

THE ARGOSY.

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THE MYSTERIES OF HERON DYKE.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MR. CHARLES PLACKETT IS PUZZLED.

"**M**IND, Ella, you have promised to come to me in London during the autumn, and to stay for a fortnight at least," had been Mrs. Carlyon's last words to her niece when she was leaving Heron Dyke: and, in making the promise, Ella Winter had fully intended to fulfil it. But the autumn was drawing to a close, Christmas would be here before long, and the visit had not been paid. Circumstances had prevented it.

But in those circumstances there seemed to be a lull now; and Mrs. Carlyon took advantage of it. She wrote a pressing letter to Ella. The cold weather was setting in, she said; her cough was becoming troublesome, and she had nearly made up her mind to go to Hyères: but nothing would induce her to go anywhere until she had seen her niece again. By return of post Mrs. Carlyon received an answer. Ella would pay the visit at once. On the following day she and Maria Kettle, whom she begged leave to bring with her, would quit the Hall for Bayswater.

Change, as Miss Winter knew, would be good for Maria. It might not be amiss for herself. Truth to tell, Miss Winter had been more disturbed by her friend's positive assertion of having seen Katherine Keen, than she cared to acknowledge even to her own mind. Maria Kettle had a fund of practical good sense, she was not at all romantically inclined; and Ella could not pooh-pooh her account, strange though it might be, as she probably would have done that of an uneducated or superstitious person.

Maria's account did not stand alone: it was impossible for Miss Winter not to recall how strongly it was corroborated. She herself had never forgotten her visit to Katherine's room, when she found her

face of the looking-glass so mysteriously covered up. There had followed the positive assertions of the two maids, Ann and Martha, that they had seen Katherine—and both of them had known her well—looking down at them over the balusters of the gallery. After that, came Mrs. Carlyon's fright; although in her case no face had been seen, but only the presence of a mysterious something which had brushed past her in the dusk and vanished. Neither could Betsy Tucker's revelation, that she had heard footsteps in the corridor outside her bed-room on the night of the storm, and had seen the handle of her door turned, and the fright to the girl in consequence, be entirely ignored: for, after it came to Miss Winter's ears, she had made enquiries of her servants and could not learn that any one of them had been in the corridor that night. They had all been too much terrified by the storm, they declared, to quit their beds. Ella did not, would not, think much of this incident. The old house was full of strange noises, especially in stormy weather, and she herself, by giving way to her fancies, could readily have got into the way of believing that she heard footfalls and whispers and rustlings, for which she could not account, almost every night of her life.

But the strange assertion made by Maria Kettle was a very different matter; Ella could not help attaching more weight to it than to all that had gone before: and the extraordinary belief of poor Susan Keen, that her sister was alive and in the house, occurred unpleasantly to her mind. Could it be? Could it by any possibility be true that Katherine Keen was still alive, that she was hiding somewhere in the old Hall, and came out into the dark corridors on occasion to frighten people? Was it in very truth she herself, and not her spirit, that had been seen at different times? Ella's heart ached as it had never ached before. No, not even when the girl disappeared and could nowhere be found; though from that day life had never been quite the same to her. The dreadful uncertainty as to what had become of Katherine had added tenfold to the pain of losing her, and now, after the lapse of so long a time, it seemed as if the uncertainty would never be cleared up. But what if she had been alive all this time; alive, and close by?—What if she had never quitted the roof of the Hall? Ella Winter's good sense urged her to reject such a theory as utterly untenable, certain difficulties presenting themselves palpably before her; but it urged her equally to reject that other theory of supernatural visitations. Between the two she knew not what to think. That Katherine had really been seen the evidence seemed conclusive. But had she been seen in the flesh, or in the spirit?

When a problem is put before you, which you find it impossible to solve, however anxious to do so, it is sometimes wise to lay it by for a while and turn the attention to other things, trusting to Him and "the unforeseen" to do for you what you cannot do for yourself. Thus did Ella Winter in the present case. She was puzzled and

distressed; and was growing a little bit nervous besides. Appetite failed; the long dark nights oppressed her, sleep gave place to wakeful restlessness, and she began to be afraid of sleeping alone. Therefore it was with a sigh of relief that she answered Mrs. Carlyon's invitation; and for the first time in her life she was not sorry to lose sight of the chimneys of Heron Dyke as the carriage whirled her and Maria Kettle away to the station.

Mrs. Carlyon had a surprise in store for her niece, as Ella discovered on the second evening after her arrival in London. Knowing her aunt's fondness for company, but being herself in no humour to enjoy it, Ella had pleaded for no large parties during her stay; that they should dine quietly *en famille*, and spend rational evenings. To this Mrs. Carlyon had readily agreed, stipulating, however, that the rule should be relaxed in favour of two or three people who might be called friends of the family. "In short, my dear," Mrs. Carlyon had said, when talking of it the day of Ella's arrival, "I promise not to introduce you to a single stranger except one."

"Except one!" repeated Ella.

"Yes, except one. A very nice old gentleman who is between sixty and seventy years old. You won't surely object to *him*!"

Ella laughed. She thought she must not hold out against any gentleman of that age, but rather welcome his acquaintance.

But Miss Winter was very considerably taken aback when, on the following evening, her aunt led her up to a little, lean, finical-looking old man, who wore the attire of a by-gone age, a brown wig, a long bottle-green coat, and curiously fine-frilled cambric-linen, and introduced him: "Mr. Gilbert Denison of Nunham Priors."

For a moment or two Ella could find no word to say. She had unconsciously pictured Mr. Denison as a very truculent sort of individual; as what her uncle would have been with all the more disagreeable points of his character intensified; as a man who employed spies, and who would shrink from nothing in his endeavours to do his kinsman harm. Yet here before her she saw a very harmless-looking old gentleman indeed, with a puckered-up, comical, yet honest and kindly face, and dark, vivacious eyes that seemed brimming over with amusement at her evident discomfiture.

Mr. Denison took her hand with an old-world air of gallantry and touched it with his lips. "Enter the First Robber," he said, with one of his whimsical smiles. "I hope my ferocious appearance does not frighten you, young lady. You will get used to me better by-and-by, my dear. Why do you look so surprised? I cannot tell you how pleased I am to meet you."

He made room for her on the sofa by his side. "Say now, I am not the sort of looking person you expected to find."

Ella smiled charmingly. Somehow she had taken a great and sudden fancy to him. "I had always thought of you as being so different," she said.

"As an ogre, no doubt," he rejoined, with a comical nod. "I know. Poor Gilbert! he had his curious fancies, and one of them was to abuse me: I'm as sure of that as if I'd heard him. My dear, I cannot tell you how pleased I am to meet you. Confess now, that you had expected to see some dangerous kind of fellow in me: one that bites, eh?"

"No, indeed," returned Ella. "I am surprised because I had no expectation of seeing you."

"And you find me a worse hobgoblin than you imagined?"

"I do not find you one at all," she said, taking the place beside him.

"Well, well; a certain personage is said not to be so black as he is painted; let us hope that it will prove so in the present case. Ah! what a pity it is that Frank's not here to-night!" he added, abruptly.

"Your son, Mr. Denison?" asked Ella, her serious dark-blue eyes bent full upon him.

"Yes, my son; my will-o'-the-wisp, my ne'er-do-weel, the plague of my life," answered Mr. Denison. In his short, sharp sentences, and abrupt turns, Ella was put strongly in mind of her uncle.

"I should have been greatly pleased to meet him," she said. "Is he away from home?"

"Away from home!" exploded the old gentleman. "He's nearly always away from home. I never know to a thousand miles where to lay my finger on him. He might be a gipsy for restlessness. He is always gadding about from Dan to Beersheba. An incorrigible young fellow—a rolling stone that will never rest anywhere. I wish to goodness he would get married to some woman who knew how to tame him and make him settle down at home!"

Ella felt amused; her face showed it. Mr. Denison shook his head and frowned.

"Now, why couldn't Frank have married you, for instance?" he suddenly asked, after a brief pause.

This amused her more. "Dear Mr. Denison, I fear it would be altogether beyond my powers to tame so inveterate a roamer," she quietly said.

"Not at all—not at all. You are just the sort of woman to do it."

It seemed rather doubtful to Ella whether this ought to be taken as a compliment. "It would have been so satisfactory, you know, to have had all the property in a nutshell—yours and mine," added the old gentleman. "Not that Frank need covet money: I shall be able to leave him some. But Heron Dyke ought to have been his—after me: he is nearer to it than you are. My dear, you have too much good sense, as I can see, to take offence at an old man's crotchets, and I am speaking to you as friend speaks to friend."

"I hope you will always so speak to me," warmly interrupted Ella.

"So I wish Frank could have known you—and taken a fancy to

you, my dear. But I fear it is too late in the day to hope for anything so desirable. Frank never was particularly wise, and I have a sort of suspicion that what he would call his affections are engaged elsewhere : have thought it for some little time."

"Then I'm sure there can be no chance for me," cried Ella, merrily.

"Well, well ; anything's better than his bringing over a black woman for a wife, and that's what I used to be afraid of at one time," continued Mr. Denison, nodding his head and his brown wig.

"I hope Frank will find his way back home in spring," he resumed, after a pause. "If you are in town about that time, Mrs. Carlyon and I must contrive to bring the pair of you together. There may be a chance yet. I don't suppose the young dog has forgotten how to make himself agreeable to the ladies, and he is considered not at all ill-looking—very much like what I was when younger."

This tried Ella's gravity a little. "As I think I said before, I shall be pleased to make your son's acquaintance," she said, demurely.

"But whether Frank comes home or not, my dear, I must have you down at Nunham in spring. You will find many things there that you have never seen before and will have little opportunity of seeing elsewhere. You are intelligent as well as sensible, and I feel sure that you will be interested."

Next to picking up a bargain in the auction rooms, nothing delighted Mr. Denison more than to secure an appreciative listener while he descanted on the rarity and value of some of his favourite curiosities ; and this he found in Ella. Ella on her part was very glad to have met him. He was a man to esteem and like, despite his eccentricities : and she felt thankful to know that the breach in the family, which had existed so many years, was healed at last. Her face flushed as she recollected that if the fear, tormenting her latterly, had grounds, Heron Dyke was not hers, but Mr. Denison's.

She did not see him again during her stay in London, for he went away to Nunham Priors. Ella was by no means certain, had he remained, that she should not have imparted to him all her doubts and fears. He and she were alike honest, wishing always to act rightly.

Her own stay in London only extended to a week : she did not like to spare more time from home at present. The week passed pleasantly and quickly ; and both she and Maria Kettle returned to the Hall in better health and spirits than they were in when they quitted it.

Gossip in remote hamlets and small country towns, more especially if the subject of it be some well-known personage, grows and spreads with a rapidity unknown to the rankest tropical weed, and Nullington was no exception to the rule. It had now become matter of common talk in the town, that there was something mysterious and unexplained with regard to Squire Denison's death. How or whence

such an idea originated, or what the mysterious something might be, people did not care to ask : and if they did there was nobody to answer. Facts that are only half known, or that are wildly guessed at, have always more fascination for ordinary minds than uncompromising truths that stand boldly out in the light of day, and which anyone can examine for themselves.

The Nullingtonians seized on the rumour with avidity, and one may be sure that it suffered nothing from loss or diminution in its transit from mouth to mouth. It was not long in reaching the ears of Nixon, the agent whom Mr. Plackett had formerly employed to report to him respecting the state of Mr. Denison's health, and the general progress of matters at the Hall. Nixon had been away from Nullington for a time, possibly prosecuting enquiries elsewhere, and these rumours greeted him on his return. Putting aside any pecuniary benefit he might gain, Nixon was naturally a man of prying and inquisitive disposition ; nothing pleased him better than worming out the secrets of other people. He went about the town asking guarded questions of this person and the other, trying to put the various fragments of gossip together and trace them to their fountain-head. Altogether, he contrived to make out something like a coherent whole : upon which he favoured the London firm, Messrs. Plackett, Plackett and Rex, with a long and confidential letter.

The letter brought down Mr. Charles Plackett, Nixon meeting him by appointment at the railway station. The two had some private conversation together.

"What we cannot understand in your report is this one item," observed Mr. Charles Plackett : "that Miss Winter herself suspects some fraud has been at work, and is as anxious to have matters investigated as we could be."

"I assure you, sir, I believe it to be so," affirmed Nixon. "My information on this point came from a sure source."

"Well, I intend to go to see her," said Mr. Charles Plackett.

Nixon opened his eyes. "To go to see her, sir ! What, at Heron Dyke ?"

"Yes. Why not ? It is the only step I can take : and, whether it brings forth fruit or not, I shall at any rate see how the land lies with regard to herself. If she is, as you think, anxious for the investigation, she is a good and honourable young lady ; that's all I can say."

Mr. Charles Plackett took a fly and drove over to Heron Dyke. He sent in his card to Miss Winter, and was at once admitted. Ella was alone. Maria Kettle had returned to the Vicarage, and Mrs. Toynbee was not yet back from London. Ella knew that the Placketts were Mr. Denison's solicitors, and she supposed this gentleman had come to bring her some message from him. That idea however, was at once dispelled.

"I am come here this morning, Miss Winter, upon rather a

curious errand," began Mr. Plckett in his cheerful, chirruping way. "But before going any farther, it may be as well to say that I am come without the knowledge of my esteemed client, Mr. Denison, of Nunham Priors. In fact I am adopting a most unusual course with a lawyer; I am venturing to intrude upon you entirely on my own account."

Miss Winter bowed. "I shall be pleased to hear anything that you may have to communicate," she said frankly.

Mr. Plckett paused. "I am somewhat non-plussed in what way to begin," he confessed, with a smile.

"A difficulty, I should imagine, that does not often arise with gentlemen of your profession," observed Ella, courteously.

The little lawyer laughed. "I believe you are not far wrong there, Miss Winter. Perhaps my best plan will be to plunge at once in medias res. I may say, then, that some disquieting rumours have reached our ears—and when I say 'ours,' in this instance I mean my own—having reference to certain events which took place in this house during your absence abroad. The events I allude to, are the illness and death of the late Mr. Denison. What we have heard would almost lead us to imagine that deception of some kind, if not fraud itself, was at work in the case: and—and——"

He paused. Ella waited.

"Frankly speaking, Miss Winter, I have heard a report that these rumours have reached yourself; and I am here to ask you—but pray do not answer the question unless you feel fully at liberty to do so—whether that is a fact?"

"Yes, it is," she freely answered. "I have heard the rumours."

"Ah! Just so. Thank you very much for your frankness. I presume, however, that you attach very little importance to them?"

"On the contrary, I attach very considerable importance to them. I do not say they are true; far from it; on the other hand, I do not know but they may be. The doubt renders me very uneasy."

"Really now! I'm sure there are not many young ladies like you, for truth and candour. But—pardon my presumption—may I ask whether you have been able to trace the rumours to any foundation? Perhaps you have not tried to do so?"

"I have tried," replied Ella. "I have used every effort to track them back to their original origin; though it is not, of course, much effort that lies in my power to make."

"And the result, madam—if I may dare to ask it?"

"There is no result. None. I cannot discover whether they are worthy of belief, or whether they are fabrications. That certain unnecessary precautions were observed during my late uncle's illness—green baize doors put up to shield him from the household; friends never admitted to him; a mysterious kind of professional nurse had down from London to attend him—is true. But those about him, Dr. Jago and old Aaron Stone, explain all this away with perfect plausibility."

Charles Plackett mused. "No, of course not; there was not much you could do," he remarked, apparently speaking to himself.

"An individual, whom I will not name, warned me that Heron Dyke was not legally mine," resumed Miss Winter. "I was startled, as you may suppose; but I could elicit nothing further. Nothing but what I tell you—that I held Heron Dyke by fraud."

"Dear me!"

"I did not know whether to believe it, or not; I do not know now. I carried the tale to Mr. Daventry, and I spoke also to my uncle's old friend, the Vicar of Nullington. Neither of them attached the smallest credibility to the charge; they almost ridiculed it. Mr. Daventry says that nothing whatever could deprive me of Heron Dyke, save my uncle's not having lived to see his seventieth birthday. And several persons saw him and conversed with him subsequent to that date."

"I did, for one," remarked Mr. Charles Plackett. "Well, I don't see that there's much to be done. You say you will not give up the name of the individual who ——"

"No," she interrupted. "And if I did give it, the end would not be answered. He—he—is no longer here; he could not be questioned."

"It is one of the most puzzling questions I ever had to do with, madam. Heron Dyke is a fine property. You would not like to give it up."

"I would give it up to-day if I were sure it were Mr. Denison's. I wish I was sure—one way or the other. If it is not mine it must be his, and he would have every right to it. Does he know of this doubt?"

"Not a word."

"I met him a short while ago, when I was in London. He came to my aunt's, Mrs. Carlyon. I took a great fancy to him."

Mr. Charles Plackett smiled. "And he took a fancy to a certain young lady—if I may say as much. He called at our office the next day, before returning to Nunham Priors. What do you think he said, Miss Winter?—that he did not so much regret the loss of Heron Dyke now, when he saw what charming hands held it."

Ella rather shrank from the compliment. "I and my interests are as nothing, Mr. Plackett, in comparison with arriving at the truth. If fraud and deception have been at work, it is to the advantage of everyone that they should be exposed and frustrated."

Mr. Plackett gazed on her glowing face admiringly. "If everyone thought and acted like you, my dear young lady," he said, "I am afraid that the occupation of us poor lawyers would soon become a thing of the past."

"That would be a catastrophe indeed," responded Ella, with a laugh.

A little more conversation ensued. One word leading to another,

Ella confided to him what the servant Eliza had told her—that she had penetrated beyond the green baize doors, on one lucky occasion when they were left unguarded, and had found the Squire's rooms empty: Mr. Denison was nowhere to be seen in them. Nay, more; the rooms and the bed appeared to be unoccupied.

Mr. Plackett, though evidently much surprised, could still make nothing of it. He sat fingering his grey hair—a habit of his when in thought. Ella finished by enquiring what more she could do.

"I really fail to see at present that there is anything more you can do," he answered. "And I am quite sure that not one person in a thousand would do as much as you have already done."

"Are you sure it was my uncle you saw," she enquired, speaking on the moment's impulse, "when you were here two days after his birthday?"

Mr. Charles Plackett paused, revolving the question. "I thought I was sure," he said. "Although I had only seen Mr. Denison twice before, and that some years previously, he certainly seemed to me to be the same individual, naturally much wasted and changed by illness. One thing I perfectly remembered: the beautiful cat's-eye ring he wore. Yes, I think it could have been no other than Mr. Denison—and no other temper than his. You heard, probably, of the passion he went into?"

"And threw away his beef-tea, and broke the cup. Truly I cannot imagine anyone doing that, save my uncle."

"I must say that I have not been so thoroughly puzzled by any case for a long while," remarked the lawyer, as he rose to depart.

And, puzzled, Mr. Plackett was destined to remain; at least for some time yet to come. If Miss Winter had looked to benefit by his advice, she was disappointed. He had no advice of any consequence to offer. He could only thank her again for her frankness, and say that he would consult with his client, Mr. Denison, and, with her permission, write to her in the course of a few days. Then, declining refreshments, he left the Hall, much more disquieted in his mind than when he had arrived at it.

But within an hour of the lawyer's departure, Miss Winter had something else to think about than his promise to write to her. There came a telegram from Edward Conroy. He had reached London, and hoped to be at Heron Dyke on the morrow.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A FRUITLESS ERRAND.

MATTERS with Philip Cleeve were not progressing quite to his satisfaction. Upon going down to breakfast one morning he was surprised to find his mother down before him. A notable thing; for Lady Cleeve was seldom able to rise early. Philip kissed her fondly.

"This is a rare treat, mother," he said. "It seems like old times come back again."

She pressed his hand and smiled tenderly in his bright, handsome face. "I want to have a little talk with you before you go out, Philip. I sat up for you last night, but you came home late."

"Ah, yes, to be sure," replied Philip hurriedly, very conscious that he was too often late. "I went round to George Winstone's lodgings, and the time slipped away"

"So long as you were enjoying yourself, dear, it was quite right," answered Lady Cleeve. In her eyes Philip could do no wrong.

"And what is it, mother, that you have to say to me?" he asked, carelessly taking up a piece of toast and playing with the butter knife. He was growing vaguely uneasy already.

"I met Mr. Tiplady yesterday," began Lady Cleeve: and Philip put down the knife without using it. His heart sank within him. "I had to call in at Wharton's about my broken spectacles, and there I found Mr. Tiplady having a new key fitted to his watch. We came away together and I took the opportunity of reminding him of his promise, given so long ago, to take you into partnership. He had by no means forgotten it, he said, and was willing that the question should be brought to a practical issue as soon as I pleased. Of course you will not take a full share at present: he intimated that: only a small one. But it will be a very great thing for you, Philip; and you can afford to wait."

Philip made no comment upon this. Lady Cleeve continued.

"I thanked him for his generosity. It *is* generous of him," she added, "to admit you with only a poor thousand pounds——"

"He does not want money," interrupted Philip, resentfully. "Tiplady is as rich as can be—and he has nobody to come after him."

"He is none the less generous; many men in his position would not take in a partner under several thousands of pounds," returned Lady Cleeve. "What I wanted to tell you was this, dear—that he will probably speak to you to-day. There need not be any further delay. Mr. Daventry will draw up the deed of partnership, and nothing will then remain but for you to pay over the money."

Philip rose abruptly and pushed back his chair. Then he turned and gazed through the window to hide his emotion. "You have not done breakfast, dear," cried Lady Cleeve in dismay. "You have eaten scarcely anything."

"I have done very well indeed, thank you, mother," he answered from the window. "I have one of my headaches this morning."

"Poor boy! the news is a delightful surprise to him," thought Lady Cleeve. "Philip is just as sensitive as he used to be."

Philip got away from his mother and the house as quickly as possible, walking along the road like a man in a dream. The thousand pounds, or the greater portion of what was left of it, had gone out of his hands to Captain Lennox. Or, rather, to that blessed

company that the Captain was just now so eager over. Early though it was, Philip must see him; and he bent his steps towards The Lilacs.

As he went along, the thought struck him that he had not seen Lennox about very lately. The last time Philip called, he was told by the man-servant that the Captain had gone out for the day, and Mrs. Ducie was ill with a cold.

It was a servant-maid who answered Philip's nervous ring at the house this morning. Her master was in London, she said.

"In London!" exclaimed Philip. "When did he go?"

"Rather more than a week ago, I think, sir," was the girl's answer.

"I want to see Captain Lennox particularly," rejoined Philip.

"I daresay he will be back soon now, sir. I've not heard that he means to make a long stay this time."

Philip pondered. "Can I see Mrs. Ducie? Ask her to pardon the early hour and see me for a minute—if she will be so kind."

"Mrs. Ducie can't see you now, sir," dissented the maid; "she is not up yet. Her cold keeps very bad, and she hardly comes down at all."

"Can you take a message to her?"

"Oh yes, sir, I can do that. Her breakfast is just gone up."

"Give my kind regards to Mrs. Ducie, and ask her if she will tell me when the Captain will be at home."

The maid ran upstairs and soon came down with the return message. Mrs. Ducie's very kind regards to Mr. Cleeve, and she had not the least notion when. Not for a few days, she thought: as his last letter, received yesterday, said nothing about it.

Philip turned away from The Lilacs as wise as he had gone, hardly heeding which way he took, save that it was from the office instead of to it. Knowing what he knew, he asked himself how it was possible for him to face Tiplady's enquiries? Out of the twelve hundred pounds given him by his mother so short a time ago, to be held by him as a sacred trust, only a balance of eighty-five pounds remained in the bank.

It is true that if Captain Lennox's prognostications respecting the splendid future of the Hermandad Silver Mining Company should prove to be correct, Philip Cleeve would more than recoup himself in the whole sum which he was now deficient. When Lennox first bought the shares for him, he had assured Philip that no further calls would be made, but despite this assurance two heavy calls had since had to be met, for "expenses"; calls which had gone far towards exhausting Philip's remaining resources. Captain Lennox had made no secret of his own disappointment and annoyance, but he was as sanguine as ever of ultimate success, and he had put it so strongly to Philip whether it would not be wiser to double his venture, rather than forfeit the sum already invested, that the latter had agreed to meet the calls, although not without a sadly misgiving heart.

As matters, however, had now turned out, he must find Lennox at once and show him the necessity for the shares being disposed of without delay. In that, Philip anticipated no difficulty, as the shares were so much sought after. Or else he must get Captain Lennox to go with him to Lady Cleeve and Mr. Tiplady and explain to them how well the money was invested, and persuade them that, in view of the splendid profits sure to accrue before long, it would be folly to sell out just now. Evidently the first thing to be done was to find Captain Lennox.

A little comforted in mind by the fact of having arrived at some sort of a decision, he made his way with hesitating steps to the office. It was a relief to him to find that Mr. Tiplady had started by an early train for Norwich, and would not be back till night. This gave Philip breathing-time, for which he was thankful.

Getting his dinner away, he spent the evening with some friends; and was careful not to reach home until sure his mother would be in bed. That night, on his sleepless pillow, he decided on his plans.

Early in the morning, before Lady Cleeve could be downstairs, Philip snatched a hasty breakfast and went out. He left a note for his mother, in which he told her that he had to go suddenly to London on business, and she was not to be surprised or alarmed if he did not return till the evening of the following day. Then he despatched a nearly identical note to Mr. Tiplady, which Philip thought a clever hit. Lady Cleeve would take it that he was away on business connected with the office; while Mr. Tiplady would be sure to imagine that it was on some affairs of his mother he was despatched to London. Making his way to the railway-station, Philip caught a passing train, and was whirled away to the metropolis.

When in London, Captain Lennox generally stayed at his favourite hotel, the "Piazza," in Covent Garden; this Philip knew, and he drove there direct from the station. The urbane individual who was fetched to answer his enquiries, and who had more of the look of a church dignitary than of a head waiter, told Philip that, although Captain Lennox was, as he surmised, frequently at the hotel, he had not been there lately. For the past six weeks, or so, they had not seen him, neither were they in a position to afford any information as to his whereabouts. All that Philip could do was to dissemble his disappointment and go.

This seemed to Philip a worse check than the one at The Lilacs the previous morning. Halting in the street, he bethought himself what he could do—where look for Lennox. Only one place presented itself to his mind: and that was the office of the Hermandad Company. It was situate in the City, New Broad Street. If he did not see the Captain there, he should at least hear where he was to be found. But Philip thought he most likely should see him.

Half an hour's drive in a hansom cab took him to Broad Street; and to the proper number, at which the cabman readily drew up.

But Philip could not so easily find the office he was in search of. On a large board outside the doorway were painted up the names of some thirty or forty different firms or companies, each of them occupying offices in the same building. Philip at length discovered the name he wanted, the last but two on the list, and was directed to mount to the third floor.

On the third floor—and a very dingy, unwholesome-smelling floor it was, for the building was an old one—he found the *Hermidad* office. Philip's imagination had led him to fancy the offices of so important a company as rather grand and great: this did not look like it. The door was shut, and he could not open it. He knocked again and again, but without response. While wondering at all this, and standing to think what he could do next, an opposite door was opened, and a sharp-looking youth came out.

"Nobody at home here apparently," remarked Philip, pointing to the door. "What's the best time to find them in?"

"Don't know," answered the youth, twisting his mouth impudently. "Nobody been here for a fortnight, save a boy to fetch letters."

"Nobody been here for a fortnight!" exclaimed Philip.

"Nobody else. Not likely. Silver-mining company, hey! Oh, *Jemima!*"

Philip could have wrung the boy's neck.

"Be you one of the green uns?" continued he. "Lots of 'em come. No use, though; not a bit; only have to go away again. Fishy—awful! Next akin to smashing up."

With these strange remarks, the boy shot off, sliding down the banisters; leaving Philip feeling sick at heart.

The *Hermidad* mine had evidently failed, and its company come to grief. A suspicion stole over Philip that Captain Lennox might be more hardly hit than the world suspected, and was keeping out of the way.

What to do, he knew not. Was there anything that he could do next, except go back home and reveal everything to his mother? He had tasted nothing all day, save his morsel of breakfast; and, although he had no appetite, he felt so faint that he knew he must take refreshment of some kind if he did not wish his strength to break down. Turning into the nearest restaurant, he called for a glass of wine, and tried to study the *carte*; but the names of the different dishes conveyed no definite ideas to his mind. "Bring me anything you have ready," he said wearily to the waiter; "a basin of soup will do." And then he lay back in his chair and shut his eyes.

The waiter had just put some soup before him, and was about to take off the cover, when Philip started to his feet with an exclamation. "By heavens! I never thought of that!" Staring around, he sat down in a little confusion: for the moment he had forgotten where he was. The waiter looked askance at him, to discover whether he was mad.

But the fact was that Philip had had what seemed to him nothing less than a flash of inspiration. He had suddenly remembered that there was such a person as Freddy Bootle in existence. Why not go to him in his trouble? Freddy was rich, and as kind-hearted as he was rich; he was not the sort of man to allow a friend to sink for want of a helping hand: in any case Philip felt sure of his sympathy and advice. Eating his soup with some degree of relish, he paid, and drove off in a hansom to Mr. Bootle's rooms in Bond Street.

Philip felt desperate. Especially at the thought of having to reveal his folly to his mother, and her consequent distress. That seemed worse than the loss of the money itself. Never had his conduct, his almost criminal weakness, presented itself to him in so odious a light as now. Had the money been absolutely his own, had it been bequeathed to him by will or come to him by any mode other than that by which it had come, he could have borne to lose it with comparative equanimity. But when he called to mind the fact that the sum which it had taken him so short a time to dissipate was the accumulation of long years of patient pinching and hoarding on the part of his mother, that it represented many a self-denied luxury, many a harmless pleasure ruthlessly sacrificed, and that all this had been done to ensure the advancement in life of his worthless self, he was almost ready to think that the sooner the world were rid of him, the better for everyone concerned. How could he ever bear to face again that mother and her thoughtful love?—how witness her pained face when he should declare his folly? *Must* she be told? If only Freddy Bootle would give him a help in this strait, what a different man he would be in time to come!

It was a break in the bitterness of his thoughts when the cab drew up at Mr. Bootle's lodgings. Philip was not kept long in suspense. An elderly man answered his knock and ring. The elderly man was sorry to say that Mr. Bootle was in Rome at present, and was not expected back till after Christmas.

"Was there ever so unlucky a wretch as I?" murmured Philip to himself as he turned, more sick at heart than ever, from the door. His one and only hope had failed him.

The short winter day was drawing to a close, and the lamps were being lighted as he turned into Piccadilly. He wandered about aimlessly for some time, into this street and that, stopping now and again to stare into a shop window, or at the unending procession of vehicles in the busier streets, and then wandering on again without seeming to see anything.

All at once he was startled into the most vivid life. Coming towards him, but yet a little distance away, and with several of the hurrying crowd between them, he saw Captain Lennox. The light from a shop-window shone full on his pale, strongly-marked features, and there could be no mistake. Philip sprang forward eagerly, and the sudden movement seemed to have the effect of attracting the

Captain's glance towards him. For one brief moment there came, or Philip thought there did, a gleam of recognition into those steel-blue eyes; the next, they and their owner were alike hidden by the intervening crowd.

Philip Cleeve shouldered his way along more roughly than he had ever done before: in a few seconds he was standing on the exact spot where he had seen Lennox, but that individual was no longer visible. He had vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed him up. Philip stared about him, like a man suddenly moonstruck, unheeding of the jostling and elbowing of the passers-by. Up the street and down the street he gazed, but no Captain Lennox was to be seen. What *could* have become of him?

"Surely he need not hide himself from me!" thought Philip. "We are both in the same boat."

Looking about for the Captain in a sort of amazed doubt, Philip saw that he stood close before the open door of a large drapery emporium. Was it possible that Lennox had taken refuge inside? No sooner did the thought flash across Philip's mind, than he marched boldly into the shop. There were several people there, customers and assistants, but no signs of the man he was seeking. A civil assistant came up, to ask what they could serve him with, and Philip frankly avowed the cause of his entering. A friend—a gentleman—had suddenly disappeared before he could reach him: he could only think he had entered the shop.

"Very possibly," the young man replied: and as he was not to be seen in it now, he might have passed through it, and left by the opposite door.

Then Philip saw that the shop was what might be called a double one; that is to say, that it had a door and window opening into another street. Had Lennox walked in at one door and out at the other, without stopping to purchase anything? It was the conclusion Philip came to. He recognised the uselessness of further pursuit of Lennox. It was clear that the Captain had purposely evaded meeting him: the reason for such evasion was not far to seek. Philip purchased a pair of gloves, and then pursued his aimless way, weary and downcast.

Where should he go, and what should he do? He knew not, and he did not greatly care. He was there alone in the huge wilderness of London, without one living creature that knew him or that cared for him. It was not too late to take the last train home; but he had a fixed repugnance against taking it. Why hasten to meet his mother's reproachful eyes, and Mr. Tiplady's incisive questionings? And yet, if he stayed the night in London, he must face those ordeals on the morrow. What could the morrow bring him, more than to-day had brought? Still he wandered aimlessly on, through one mile of street after another, his thoughts brimming over with bitterness at the recollection of all his mad folly. What now to

him but mad folly seemed those nights at The Lilacs when, flushed with wine, he had staked his mother's savings on the turn of a card, and had seen the gold, hoarded by her for his sake, swept almost contemptuously into the pockets of such men as Camberley and Lennox, who, the moment his back was turned, probably sneered at him as a jay parading in peacock's plumes? What now to him, but folly, seemed the spells which he had allowed to be woven round him by the witcheries of Margaret Ducie? In his heart of hearts he had never really cared for her, however much at the time he might fancy that he had—not even when her hold over him had seemed the strongest. And now, when he looked back, she assumed in his thoughts the semblance of one of those specious phantoms, lovely to look upon, but who seem sent only to lure weak-minded fools to destruction.

Poor Philip! from the burning thoughts within him rose next another phantom. Nothing specious about *her*, but pure and saint-like as a lily steeped in dew—the image of Maria Kettle. Had he indeed lost her? He knew now how much she was to him; that he had never loved but her.

Yes, she was surely lost to him for ever. He would have no home to take her to, and no prospect of winning a position for himself: a life of commonplace drudgery, of separation from the only woman he had ever loved, or could love, was all that now lay before him.

Still onward, ever onward, went he in his pain. "Oh, my darling, you might have saved me if you would!" he cried. "You might, you might!"

Still onward, ever onward. From tower and steeple the hours were clanged out one after another, but he heeded them not. It was close upon midnight when he found himself standing on one of the great bridges that span the Thames. Far away into the blackness on either side of him the great city spread itself out, seeming to his imagination, at that hour, like some huge monster that was slowly settling itself down to sleep. Silently below him ran the sullen river, stealthily carrying its dread secrets down to the sea. Here and there a few feeble lamps mocked the darkness.

Philip Cleeve stood and gazed over the parapet into the black-flowing stream below. How many unhappy men might not have flung off life's bitter burden at that very spot? How easy the process! A leap, a plunge, a minute's brief struggle, and then the deep, deep sleep that knows no waking. Could it be really wrong to throw away that which was no longer of value, which had become a burden? The question kept coming back to him, like a thing that bears a fascination. He could hear the faint lapping of the tide against the piers; and, the longer he gazed down at the water, the more it seemed to whisper to him of peace and rest, and a quiet ending to all his troubles. Why not quit a world in which there no longer seemed a place for him? Why not?

Ah, why? Philip knew he was not honest in asking it.

Suddenly there arose a sound behind him, as of the quick patter of feet. Before Philip had time to interfere, before he well knew what had happened, a female figure, scantily clad, and with hair flying to the winds, had sprung on one of the stone seats, and thence on to the parapet. For one brief instant she stood thus, dimly outlined against the starlit sky; then, with hands clasped above her head, and a low, wild cry, she sprang headlong to her death.

A little crowd gathered, as if by magic, where there had seemed to be scarcely anyone a minute before. Faint at heart, dizzy with the sudden horror of the thing, Philip Cleeve fell back from the rest. What were his little troubles compared with those which must have driven that poor desperate creature to destruction? The black, sullen river had suddenly become hateful to him, and he made haste to leave it far behind.

CHAPTER XXX.

COUNSEL TAKEN WITH MR. MEATH.

ANXIOUS revelations, were those, which Ella Winter had to pour into the ears of her lover! For he was by her side now, not to leave her for long together again. The cloud, which during the last few months had been lowering over her life, was lightened at last; the burdens which had been growing too heavy for her to bear, were lifted now upon shoulders stronger and more able to sustain them. Suspense and distress lay around still; but, compared with what had been, she walked in sunshine, gladness in her eyes and in her heart, and Love's sweet whispers in her ears.

Edward Conroy took up his quarters at the hotel in Nullington, whence he walked over frequently to Heron Dyke. Mrs. Toynbee, back at the Hall now, was not slow to perceive the state of affairs. She wrote to her friend and patroness, Lady Dimsdale, that she was afraid she should have to look out for another home before long: for, unless she was much mistaken, Miss Winter was about to marry. The gentleman, she was good enough to say, was a very pleasant, nice-mannered person, named Conroy; but it seemed to her a great pity that Miss Conroy had not chosen someone more nearly her equal in the social scale.

The weather was mild and open for the time of year, and Conroy and Ella were much out of doors. During these rambles the conversation turned upon the past affairs—and many a consultation took place as to what could be done to bring all that was dark to light.

There was so much of it—taken as a whole. So many points that presented their own difficulties. The doubt as to whether Ella was the legal inheritor of Heron Dyke; the disappearance of Katherine Keen, and the superstition that arose out of it; the

murder of the ill fated Hubert Stone, and the robbery of the jewels: all these were matters of grave perplexity, upon which no light had yet been thrown.

Edward Conroy was puzzled by it all—just as Mr. Charles Plackett had been. He seemed never to tire of questioning Ella on this point and on that, and made notes sometimes of her answers: but he was none the nearer seeing his way to any elucidation.

"Have you fully calculated what the result to yourself will be if it is discovered that fraud has been at work?" he said to her, when they had been speaking of the doubt as to Heron Dyke.

"Fully," replied Ella.

"Home, money, and lands pertaining to the estate—all will go from you."

"I know it. But would you have me act otherwise than as I have acted?—have kept the doubt to myself?"

"Not for worlds."

"I think—I think, Edward, you are as anxious to discover the truth as I am."

"More so."

"Although it be against your own interest. After all, it may be that you will have a penniless wife, compared with the rich one you expected."

"So much the better. She will owe all the more to me, and the world cannot then say that I have married her for her fortune."

"As if you cared for anything the world might choose to say!"—and to this remark Mr. Conroy slightly laughed in answer.

He had not been more than a day or two at Heron Dyke, when Miss Winter put into his hands the malachite and gold sleeve-link which Betsy Tucker had sent her by Mrs. Keen. Betsy was recovering slowly from her illness; all danger was over.

"I should like to see the young woman, and question her," observed he, turning the link about in his hand, as he examined it critically.

"There will be no difficulty," said Ella. "Betsy has been out for one airing, and she can come here. Why do you look at the trinket so attentively? Have you ever seen it before?"

"Never. But it is one of rather remarkable workmanship."

A fly brought Betsy Tucker to the Hall. There, in the presence of Mr. Conroy, she was requested to point out the place, as nearly as she could recollect it, where she had picked up the link. It was within a few yards of the spot where Hubert Stone was found. The girl had nothing more to tell, and sobbed out her contrition for her fault. Miss Winter was everything that was kind; but Mr. Conroy, speaking sternly, warned her not to disclose a word to anyone about what she had found, or there was no telling what the consequences to herself might be. The girl, with many tears, promised faithfully to keep the secret, and seemed only too glad to be let off so easily.

The sleeve-link had not belonged, so far as could be ascertained, to Hubert: whether it had, or had not, been the property of his assailant, was another matter. If so, it must have been wrenched from his sleeve during the scuffle; and, as Edward Conroy shrewdly saw, it proved that the assailant was a gentleman. No man in an inferior station would be likely to wear such a link.

"I shall run up to town to-morrow," said Edward Conroy to Ella, when the interview was over and they were alone.

"To town! For anything in particular?"

"And take this malachite-and-gold trinket with me," he added. "If this link can be traced out to its owner, it may lead to some discoveries."

Mr. Conroy accordingly went to London. This, it will be noted, was within two or three days of his first arrival at Heron Dyke. He returned from London the following day, having put matters, together with the sleeve-stud, as he informed Miss Winter, into efficient hands. Taking up his abode, as before, at Nullington, he passed a good portion of his days at Heron Dyke.

Months before this, Conroy had heard tell of the strange disappearance of Katherine Keen; but only now was he made aware that the Hall was supposed to be haunted by her presence. He listened to the story of how the two maids, whom Aaron Stone had afterwards discharged in consequence, had positively asserted that they saw her looking down at them from the gallery; he heard the story of Mrs. Carlyon's fright, and of Maria Kettle's strange experience not long ago. The evidence, taken collectively, was too strong to be ignored, despite his inclination to take that course.

"I wish the ghost would favour me with a visit!" he heartily exclaimed. "I would do my best to put its unsubstantiality to the proof."

"I know not which would be the worst: to find that Katherine is in the Hall in the flesh—that she is not dead, as her poor sister believes, or that it is haunted by her spirit," breathed Miss Winter in answer.

"Have you any objection to my exploring this north wing?" he enquired, after a pause of thought.

"Not the least. I should be thankful for you to do so."

Mr. Conroy lost no time. That same afternoon he ascended to the north wing; and did not come down until he had visited every nook and corner of it. Room after room, passage after passage, closet after closet, he examined, and satisfied himself that no person or thing was hidden in them. Taking the precaution to lock the doors, he brought the keys away with him.

"Troubled spirits never walk by daylight, I believe," remarked Mrs. Toynbee to him. She had never relished the superstitious tales. "We must look for them by dark, Mr. Conroy, if at all."

"That is just what I mean to do," replied Conroy.

And accordingly he took to rambling about the north wing in the dusk of evening, in the hope that, one time or another, he should encounter the supposed ghost. He would sit for half an hour at a time, silent and immovable, in the darkest corner of the gallery, with no company but the mice busy at work behind the wainscot. "I may have to wait for weeks," he said to Ella, "but if there be any ghost at all, I shall be sure to see it by-and-by."

One evening when dusk was creeping on, a certain Mr. Meath arrived at the Hall, a telegram to Conroy having given previous notice that he might be expected; and he was at once admitted.

The stranger was the chief of a well-known enquiry-office in London: it was to him that Conroy had confided the sleeve-link. He was a tall, lanky, angular-boned man of sixty, with dyed hair and a slow, deferential smile. He always dressed in black, as being the most becoming wear for a gentleman, and that he invariably looked the latter Mr. Meath was fully persuaded; whereas he had in fact more of the air of a prosperous undertaker than of anything else. In his peculiar profession he was known to be a shrewd and practised man.

He was shown into one of the smaller drawing-rooms. No sooner had Edward Conroy entered it and sat down, than Mr. Meath arose and satisfied himself that the door was really shut, and that no one was hidden behind the curtains.

"Excuse these little precautions, sir," he said with his deferential smile, "but I have more than once had occasion to prove the value of them."

"Oh, no doubt. Your telegram stated that you had some news for me, Mr. Meath," added Conroy.

"I have some news for you, sir—news which may prove of importance. Before proceeding any further in the matter, I thought it would be as well to let you know the result already arrived at, and take your instructions with regard to future proceedings."

Hitching his chair nearer the table, Mr. Meath drew forth a little box from one of his pockets. "Here is the sleeve-link," he said, as he opened the box. "You have doubtless observed, sir, that it is of rather a curious and uncommon pattern?"

"Yes. If you remember, I said so when I saw you in town."

"On examining this under a powerful glass," continued Mr. Meath, "I presently detected what I felt nearly sure could be nothing less than the private mark of the firm that had manufactured it. I took the link to the foreman of a large firm of jewellers with whom I had had some transactions previously, and he at once confirmed my view. 'There could be no doubt it was the manufacturers' mark,' he said. The question was—who were the manufacturers?"

"He did not know?"

"He did not know, sir. But he thought he might be able to find out, if I would leave the link with him for a couple of days. Which I agreed to."

"And did he?" asked Mr. Conroy.

The private-enquiry officer solemnly nodded. "At the end of the couple of days he sent for me, sir, and told me he had discovered the private mark to be that of Messrs. Wooler and Wooler of Piccadilly. An eminent firm—as perhaps you know, Mr. Conroy."

"I have heard the name."

"To Messrs. Wooler I accordingly went, disclosed as much of the affair to them as was necessary, and stated what I wanted to know. They were most obliging, and at once promised to consult their books. Yesterday they sent for me. They had found from their books that the sleeve-link I now hold in my hand was one of a pair which, together with various other articles of which they were good enough to furnish me with a list and description, had been supplied by them about four years ago to a certain Major Piper, then living at Cheltenham. May I ask you, sir, whether you happen to be acquainted with any such gentleman; or whether he is known in this neighbourhood?" concluded the speaker, after making a brief pause.

"I am not. And I cannot tell you whether he is known in the neighbourhood: I am nearly a stranger to it myself. But I can enquire of the ladies here," added Conroy, rising to quit the room.

He returned, saying that Miss Winter did not know anyone of the name. Mrs. Toynbee did. She had met a Major Piper once or twice in society; but not lately; and she believed him to be a highly respectable man.

"I have the Major's address at Cheltenham in my pocket-book," said Meath; "or rather what was his address four years ago. It is quite possible that he may have gone away from the town, or have died in the interim."

"Very possible indeed," answered Conroy.

"It rests with you to decide whether you think it worth while to proceed any farther in the case. If this Major Piper be still at Cheltenham, there will not be any difficulty in finding him: if he is not, there may be, especially should it turn out that he is what we call a shady individual. Difficulty, and also expense."

"Having gone so far, I certainly think we ought to go farther," answered Conroy. "Are you not of that opinion yourself?"

"I am, sir: but, as I say, it is for you to decide. We have got hold of a clue of some sort. Whether it will lead us up to what we want to know, time and perseverance only can prove."

"I certainly think Major Piper ought to be found. As to expense, I gave you carte-blanche for that when I was in London."

"Then I will proceed in the matter without delay," said Mr. Meath, rising. "And I hope, sir, I shall shortly have something further to report to you."

"But you will take something before you go away," said Conroy, ringing the bell.

Putting down the hat he had taken up, Mr. Meath acknowledged that he would be glad of something. A tray of refreshments was brought in; and presently he departed as silently as he had come.

A few days elapsed, during a portion of which Edward Conroy was away upon his own affairs. Close upon his return, Mr. Meath again made his way to Heron Dyke, calling, as before, in the dusk of the evening. Miss Winter had grown anxious as to the result of enquiries; and she told Edward Conroy that she should like to be present during the interview, if there were no objection.

There was no objection, Conroy said, and took her into the room with him. They all sat down together.

"I have been more successful than I ventured to anticipate," began Mr. Meath in his slow way—which Edward Conroy somewhat impatiently interrupted.

"Then you have found Major Piper?"

"I have found Major Piper, sir: I had very little difficulty in finding him. He is not at Cheltenham now; he is at Bath; though Cheltenham is his general place of residence. Major Piper is a retired Indian officer, well known and respected."

And the account of the interview may possibly read less complicated if related as it took place, instead of as repeated by Mr. Meath.

He saw Major Piper at his lodgings at Bath: a little man, who had one of his gouty feet swathed in flannel. Mr. Meath disclosed his business, and put the malachite-and-gold sleeve-link into his hands. The Major recognised it at once, and smiled with pleasure.

"Ah," said he, "I don't forget this. It formed one out of a dozen, or so, small articles of value which disappeared from my dressing-case at Cheltenham under mysterious circumstances. It was about—yes—about four years ago. I had bought the jewellery in London, intending it as a present to my nephew on his twenty-first birthday. However, the very evening before it was to have been sent off, the things disappeared from my dressing-case."

"Had you any suspicions as to who could have taken them?" enquired Mr. Meath.

"No, I was utterly nonplussed: and am so still when I think of it," answered the Major. "I had some friends that night at my rooms, just enough to make up a couple of rubbers, all gentlemen of position who were more or less known to me. Early in the evening, when telling them what I had bought for my nephew, my man Tompkins brought in the dressing-case at my desire, and passed round the jewellery for the different guests to look at. After that, Tompkins took it away and put it back where he had found it—in one of the deep drawers in my dressing-table, but without locking it up; not, indeed, seeing any necessity for doing so. He——"

"I presume, sir, your man was trustworthy?" interrupted the listener.

"Perfectly so. Tompkins had been with me for years in India

and is with me still. The loss troubled him, I think, more than it troubled me. Not, of course, that I cared to lose the things."

"Did any of the gentlemen enter your dressing-room during the evening?"

"Dear me, yes. It adjoined the sitting-room, and some of them were in and out. Candles were alight in it. Well, the next day, when the small case of jewellery came to be looked for it was nowhere to be found; nor, so far as I am aware, has anything been heard of it from that day to this."

"Sir," said Mr. Meath, "was it possible that any person could have had access to your dressing-room in the course of the evening, while you and your visitors were busy at the card-table?"

"No, that could not be," answered Major Piper. "To get access to the dressing-room they must have passed through the room where we sat; or else through a little ante-room on the other side the dressing-room, and Tompkins sat in the ante-room the whole evening long."

"Did you put the matter into the hands of the police?" enquired Mr. Meath.

"I had it enquired into privately by the police," replied the Major, "but I would not allow it to be made public. On the one hand it was impossible for me to suspect my servant; while on the other I did not choose to have it thought that I suspected any of my guests. It was a most disagreeable affair and worried me a good deal at the time. I was always hoping that something might turn up: but I suppose it has grown too late in the day to expect it now."

"I don't know that," said Mr. Meath. "This sleeve-link may prove the connecting link between your robbery and the still darker crime recently enacted at Heron Dyke: that is, it may lead to the discovery of both perpetrators, who may prove to have been one and the same man. Will you, sir, oblige me with the names of the gentlemen, so far as your memory serves, who made up your card-party on the night of the loss."

"There can be no objection to my doing that," said the Major; "and I hope with all my heart it may prove of use to you. I can tell you every name; for the night and its doings lie with unfaded impression on my memory."

Mr. Meath took down the names from his dictation, as well as the date when the robbery occurred. They all appeared to be men of standing; most of them of undeniable connections.

"Two of them, Dr. Backhouse and my old comrade, Sir Marcus Gunn, are dead," remarked the Major. "Of the others, two are living in Cheltenham; one lives abroad, attaché to an embassy; and one or two have passed out of my knowledge. They may be living anywhere: the world is wide."

"Will you point out those one or two to me," asked Mr. Meath—and Major Piper did so.

Such was the substance of the narrative Mr. Meath had now to relate at Heron Dyke. "I have brought the list of names with me," he added to Mr. Conroy when he finished. "Perhaps, sir, you and this lady will be good enough to look at it, and to tell me whether any one of the gentlemen is known in this neighbourhood."

Edward Conroy took the paper handed to him, and ran his eyes over the list, but without the least expectation of finding on it any name that he should recognise. Mr. Meath watched him with a kind of suppressed eagerness.

"'Admiral Tamberlin,'" read out Conroy in a muttered tone, "'Dr. Backhouse, Sir Gunton Cleeve'"—and before speaking the next name, he came to a dead standstill. Mr. Meath, the suppressed eagerness still in his eyes, smiled grimly to himself when he saw Conroy's start of surprise.

For a moment Conroy stared at the name, which he had not yet spoken, in speechless amazement. Then, recovering himself, he passed the paper to Miss Winter without a word, simply pointing with his forefinger to the name.

"Oh, impossible!" exclaimed Ella, her tone full of fright, her face turning white as death.

"Madam," interposed Mr. Meath, detecting her emotion, "it does not follow that because a gentleman may have been wearing these sleeve-links now, he was the one to steal them from Major Piper. The thief may have sold them, and he bought them legitimately."

"But, see you not, sir," cried Ella, grasping the case mentally, "that if this gentleman made one of the Major's guests that evening, and it was he who lost the link in the struggle here with Hubert Stone——"

She paused, unable to continue. Mr. Meath slowly nodded his head. "Yes, madam, I see the difficulties—if this gentleman is indeed known here——"

"Known here! why, he lives here," interrupted Ella. "Oh, Edward, it cannot, cannot be!"

"My dear, you go to Mrs. Toynbee," whispered her lover. "Say nothing to her. Leave me to deal with this."

"But, Edward—surely you will not accuse him!" she cried aloud.

"Of course I will not. It may be that this dreadful suspicion can be cleared away. Mr. Meath"—looking at that able man—"must make it his business to ascertain first of all, if he can, whether grounds for accusing him exist." And, opening the door for her to pass out, Conroy resumed his seat at the table.

Again Mr. Meath left the Hall as quietly as he had entered it. Edward Conroy joined the ladies, and found that not a word had been spoken to Mrs. Toynbee. He stayed to dine with them.

The winter afternoon had deepened to a still, close evening, when Mr. Conroy once more took his way to the north wing—for his

watchings there had not ceased—before quitting the Hall for the night. The incident of the afternoon had disturbed him greatly, while Miss Winter felt thoroughly upset. His thoughts were bent upon it as he passed silently through the passages: of Katherine Keen this night he never once thought. Perambulating the still and deserted corridors, his mind utterly preoccupied, he came last of all to the gallery. He knew every nook and corner of the wing by this time, and could find his way about it in the dark almost as readily as by daylight. In one corner of the gallery was an old oak chair, and on this he now sat down, almost without being aware of what he did. Meath's news was working in his brain, bringing him disquiet and perplexity.

He might have sat for five minutes or for twenty, he could not tell which afterwards, when the deathlike silence that brooded over the place was suddenly broken. All at once a low, sweet, wailing voice spoke through the darkness—a woman's voice, with tears in it: "Oh! why don't you come to me? How much longer must I wait?"

Only those few words, and then utter silence again. Conroy started to his feet with an exclamation of surprise. He had been so immersed in his sombre meditations, he was so utterly taken unawares, that he was altogether at a loss to know from which direction the voice had come, whether from the right hand or the left, whether from above or below. He stood without moving for what seemed to him a number of minutes, hoping to hear the voice again, or the sound of footsteps, or some other token of a living presence; but in vain he listened. He heard a far-away door clash faintly in another wing of the house, but nothing more. He was alone with the silence and the darkness.

By-and-by, when convinced that his remaining there longer would be useless, he went slowly down the dark, shallow stairs which led below. It would never do to tell Ella in what manner he had been disturbed. She had enough of other troubles to occupy her thoughts at present.

None the less was Edward Conroy determined to fathom the mystery of the north wing; if it were possible for man to fathom it.

(To be continued.)

A MURDERED POET.

BY C. E. MEETKERKE.

WHEN the Archbishop of Paris, delicately and with all due deference, reminded Talleyrand, upon his death-bed, that he had taken several false and contradictory oaths, Talleyrand replied that all good Frenchmen had taken as many of the same quality *for the glory of France*.

We are not told if the reply was considered to be satisfactory: but it was given at a time when many original notions were adopted, and when, much as the glory of France might have been enhanced by lying and faithbreaking, it was still more exalted by a costlier outlay: the lavish expenditure of valuable lives. Bloodshed set the seal upon every new move and ratified every fresh engagement. Laws were inaugurated with massacres, and the price of bread was settled at the point of the bayonet. Humanity ceased to be of any weight in the scales, and the touching truism of the patriot Van de Weyer: "If I were dead I should have to be replaced," was the conclusion reached with comfortable alacrity by the heads of factions.

"If a man died, he had to be replaced." Neither was there any want of readiness on the part of the victims; they rushed recklessly upon destruction and fell with all the warmth of fanaticism; like martyrs in a heroic cause: "they fell and wished to fall."

But there was one notable fact concerning the July days of 1830. When the list of the dead was made out, hardly a single well-known name appeared upon it. The movement had been so sudden, so spontaneous, so exclusively the work of the masses, that no time had been allowed to assemble the greater men whose co-operation would have been certain: many who properly belonged to it did not appear till the revolution was nearly over; those who were already distinguished, it was said, arrived too late; those who were not, retired too soon. Amongst the latter was George Farcy, poet and scientist. He retired too soon, with a bullet in his chest, from the ranks of the combatants—from the ranks of thoughtful, industrious, well-educated men. Time had not yet matured him or given him his place: and it was only his personal friends who looked forward to his future and knew that he could have served his country in a much more satisfactory manner than by an inglorious and unprofitable death.

They erected a monument upon the spot where he fell: they painted portraits of him: they published his poems; and one, more appreciative than the rest, thought tenderly and sadly how it would have been with him if he had lived; what he would have thought; what he would have felt: coming to the conclusion that he had done well to die.

George Farcy was born in Paris, in 1800, of a poor and obscure family. His parents dying whilst he was yet a child, he was put to school, and as soon as he was sufficiently advanced, to the College of Louis le Grand.

In 1819 he was entered at the Ecole Normale, and remained there until the institution was abolished in 1822.

For these years all that was known of the orphan boy was that he was patient, steady, and industrious: he studied much; distinguished himself in the classes and gained the good opinion of all who came in contact with him; but he was alone in the world, and no one knew what he felt or suffered, enjoyed or desired. An extreme and unalterable reserve, a great timidity and sensitiveness of nature, rendered intimacy with him very difficult, and never altogether thorough and absolute. He never spoke of himself, of his views, his wishes, his ambitions. Independent of sympathy and support, he verified the saying that great men, like great mountains, are often crowned with icebergs. Fate may seem to have been cruel to him, but by rendering him a solitary, she made him a self-reliant man. Unshackled, unspoilt, untamed by the debilitating sweetnesss of family ties, he had strengthened himself with the strength that comes of freedom, and won an energy only to be learned by isolation.

When the Ecole Normale was broken up, Farcy took up his abode in the Rue d'Enfer, near to his old preceptor, Victor Cousin, steadily following up his philosophical studies. To resolve the questions: What can I know? What ought I to do? For what may I hope? was supposed to be his vocation. His friends assumed that his taste, his education, his natural talents lay all in this direction, and that he was born to follow up the spiritualistic tendencies which had emanated from the Ecole Normale.

He was a lover and a writer of poetry, but very doubtful of his own genius. "I could not bear it to be said of my verses: 'They are not so bad after all,'" he wrote to M. de Viguier; which was, however, just what was said when the poems were published. They were thought to be wanting in brilliancy, in freshness, in harmony; but the feeling was honest and deep, and the impression produced, that of a mournful and resigned stoicism reviewing life regretfully but still without complaint. Time, and a less self-contained and solitary life, might doubtless have imbued them with a different tone; and if it be true that a man cannot make himself a poet, it is equally so that if poetry be born in a man it will bloom out of him, however long and systematically it may be repressed. George Farcy was educated to be a philosopher, persuaded himself to become a politician; but if he had not thrown away his life—(for the glory of France)—it is very possible that science and politics would have ultimately made way for poetry, and that he would have emancipated himself from all that was merely a growth, and held in the long run to that which is an inspiration.

It would appear that it was no easier fifty years ago than it is now, no easier in France than in England, for a young man to obtain fortune and independence by his own sheer energy and talent. Honest and liberal-minded servants were not acceptable in government offices, and could not hope for the most modest employment.

Farcy was offered a situation as tutor in a Russian family of distinction, and he accepted it. But though it was the best possible opportunity of making himself acquainted with a hitherto unknown world—the world of fashion, pleasure, and luxury; although it was the very opportunity he had desired, his shy and untamed nature suffered severely under the fetters. He rebelled against the want of equality and freedom of the position, and described himself with an exaggerated bitterness as smarting under galling and dishonourable chains.

Returning to literature as a means of subsistence, he undertook a translation of Dugald Stewart's "*Elements of Philosophy*," to which he appended an able exposition of various difficult and delicate psychological questions. It was said of him by his associates that he was a Scotchman in logic and in looks, and that no more minute description could be given of him: fair, light-haired and blue-eyed, he was reserved by nature; short and concise in conversation; acute and accurate in habits of thought.

Having at last succeeded in procuring the sinews of war, he emancipated himself from social and literary bondage, and betook himself, free and untrammelled, to the land of scholars, lovers, and poets—to Italy. The grand desolation of Rome, its sublime silence—its memories—its ruins—penetrated and absorbed him. He could hardly tear himself away from its vast melancholy plains, its gloomy villas lost in the darkness of their pines and cypresses; but to Rome modern he would have nothing to say. "I am not at all struck dumb," he wrote, "either with St. Peter's, or the Pope, or the cardinals, or the ceremonies of the Holy Week, the Easter benediction always excepted."

Passing on to Naples, a new life opened before him. Ischia—the isles, the bay, the sea, were all a dream of enchantment. He would remain for days and days together hidden in orange groves with Petrarch, André Chénier, and Byron, sometimes composing verses of his own, which he would send off to Paris, beseeching from his friends a frank and honest criticism.

Passing through Florence, he saw Lamartine, and having no letter of introduction, he sent some verses with a note, which he described afterwards in writing to M. Viguier as being as cavalier as possible, lest the great poet should take him for a pedant or a sycophant. Lamartine welcomed him cordially, and encouraged him to pursue his poetical career. In 1827 he returned to Paris on his way to Brazil without communicating with anybody.

He had engaged, with little wisdom, in an enterprise from which he

hoped to realise a considerable fortune, but was even at the moment of undertaking it so little certain of success that he was afraid of advice and remonstrance.

The scheme failed, and in a year's time he returned to France, and all that was ever known about his absence was the fact that it had brought him nothing but disappointment—that he had been taken in and cheated. He was very reserved in his communications on the subject, it being his constant maxim, "If you wish your secret to remain a secret never confide it, for why should another be more discreet than you are? Your own confidence is always an example and an excuse."

He had left his country a boy; he returned to it a man. The somewhat harsh and positive tone which is the sign of youth and ignorance, had given place to a calmer, wider, more benevolent manner of thought. He was more tolerant, more ready to hear, to examine, to be convinced. The picture of a man who has received a liberal education, as drawn by Professor Huxley, serves well for that of Farcy. He had been so trained in his youth that his body was the ready servant of his will to do with ease and pleasure all that as a mechanism it is capable of. His intellect was a clear, cold, logic-engine, with all its parts of equal strength, and in smooth working order, ready, like a steam-engine, to be turned to any kind of work, and spin the gossamers as well as forge the anchors of the mind. He had learned to love all beauty, whether of nature or art, to hate all vileness, and to respect others as himself.

In a journal found after his death were traced some sad reflections on the solitariness of his existence, which give some description of his habits of reverie.

"I can now," he wrote, "pass the whole of a fine night alone, walking about and dreaming, without remembering that night is the time for rest, without being the least desirous of following the example of those around. It is a state of progress upon which I congratulate myself. I believe that years, in taking from me more and more the need of sleep, will augment this power which seems to me most favourable for those who desire to occupy the mind. Thought comes to me at such moments not only as a truth but also as a sentiment. There is a calm, a sweetness, a sadness in all that is around which penetrates the senses; and this sweetness, this sadness falls truly drop by drop upon the heart like the freshness of evening. I know nothing that would be so sweet as to wander at that hour with a beloved woman."

But this was just the happiness to which Farcy never attained: no loving life had ever taken possession of his own, or taught him how better to exist than in speculations, contemplations, and dreams. The political world was divided and subdivided into coteries, salons, and schools. Farcy looked on, a calm, almost an indifferent, spectator. In poetry and in art, he sought for the beautiful, the perfect, the

true—for that which came direct from the heart and went straight to it. In politics he was disposed to take the liberal side, the cause of the people, believing in the dogma of human perfectibility.

He lived peaceably and apart, a simple uneventful life, and lost in metaphysical and moral meditations whilst the laws were being promulgated which led to revolution. The last thoughts written in his journal appear to have been dictated by a presentiment: "Everyone," he wrote, "is an artist charged to carve his own likeness on his tomb, and every act of his life imprints one of the lines which compose it.

"Nature alone decides if it should be the statue of a man in youth, maturity, or old age. All that we have to do is to take care that it should be beautiful and worthy of all eyes."

At the beginning of those frantic July days, as soon as he heard that Paris was in arms, he left his happy solitude in the valley of Aulnay, and hastened back to the Rue d'Enfer. He was advised to prudence, but replied, "Who should be sacrificed but the men who have neither wife nor child?" The movement in the streets was still uncertain. The French nation was ready to rise against the Court party and the Roman Catholic priesthood, but they had neither capable leaders nor any decided line of action. The Royal troops occupied the Champs Elysées, and were firing down the Rue de Rohan when Farcy entered it with an attacking party. He was one of the first to fall, struck by a bullet in the middle of the chest. M. Littré, at whose feet he fell, had him carried a few steps into a wine-shop, and a young surgeon who was at hand did all he could to save him, but in vain. He was perfectly calm and collected, and when they asked him if there were anyone he wished to see, he answered "No one." Once only, when a greater tumult was heard in the streets, he expressed a fear that the people might be worsted; reassured upon that point, he closed his eyes and never spoke again. His body was conveyed to Père la Chaise, and buried there with the rest of the victims of July, 1830. And upon a memorial stone erected on the place where he fell was written:—

A la Mémoire de George Farcy :

Il adorait

La France, la Poésie, et la Philosophie.

Que la patrie conserve son nom.

JACK LAYBOURNE'S INHERITANCE.

BY JOYCE DARRELL, AUTHOR OF "THAT CHARMING COUNT."

I.

MY sister Kate and I were—well, over twenty, and we disposed of ample means. We availed ourselves of these two circumstances to do a great deal of travelling about the Continent. One early summer, on our way through Switzerland, from Italy to England, we decided to make acquaintance with the beautiful Zimmer Thal. For this purpose we engaged a carriage to drive us from Thün to Aigle, and on the particular afternoon when my story opens, we were already within six hours' journey from the latter place.

The scenery had been lovely, but now it was—as Monsieur de Talleyrand would have said—*pas si bien*. We had reached a high point among the green Alps, where these presented somewhat bare and rugged crests, worn quite bald in parts from the recent slipping of the snow. Small patches of this still lay about in these first days of July, and the stillness of the lofty places was broken and made musical by the thousand babbling brooklets sent down the hillsides by the ice still melting far above. The few chalets dotted about were deserted, for the inhabitants had migrated to mow the first hay lower down in the valley. In these higher regions the grass of the sloping pastures wore the fresh delicious verdure of earliest summer, and was thickly gemmed with wild flowers, whose fragrance floated upwards like incense through the pure air.

Our immediate destination was the Hôtel du Sceptre, a chalet-pension perched on a high table-land, and whose sole *raison d'être* was the fact that it made a convenient halting-place between Château d'Œu and Sepey.

"Have you quite decided to go on to Aigle, to-morrow?" asked Kate, after a pause of somewhat drowsy contemplation. My sister was placid and a little lazy. The consequence was that the administrative portion of our common life fell upon me.

"Of course!" I said. "What shall we delay for? If Sepey were not so stuffy, I should have gone on there this evening, for I believe this place we are going to stop at offers no attractions. It's one of the cheap pensions affected by British widows and old maids."

"Well! we are British old maids ourselves," replied my sister, in her comfortable monotone. Finding nothing to say in answer to this that would not have sounded fatuous, I held my peace. And presently the carriage stopped. The Hôtel du Sceptre was exactly what I expected it to be. It summed up the whole region in itself. There were half-a-dozen poor chalets near it, but they had nothing to do

with it, and were not numerous enough to constitute a separate neighbourhood.

A short but level drive led up to the pension, which was surrounded by a garden, where the lilacs were just fading and the laburnums just coming into bloom. An obsequious landlord and a ruddy-cheeked maid or two came running out to greet us, and several smooth, discreet-looking heads, unmistakeably English, appeared at the windows and inspected us.

Half-an-hour or so after our arrival the tea-bell rang; for, of course, as in all places of the kind, the dinner-hour was early. On descending, we found the usual long table, covered with cold meat, mountain strawberries, whipped cream and a line of teapots. Established at the same were many ladies and a few men. The fragments of conversation which reached our ears had reference chiefly to the various excursions undertaken that afternoon. Kate and I as newcomers were relegated to the foot of the table. Here I found myself beside a lively old maid who seemed to think herself very fortunate in having somebody new to talk to.

"We have been almost the same party for three weeks," she remarked, "and I for one began to despair of seeing a fresh face. I daresay you wonder what attraction the place has in any way; but the truth is it is supposed to be good for the nerves, and people come here to make what the natives call the 'cure.'"

"And are all these people nervous invalids?" I asked in some alarm.

"No," said my companion with a smile, "some—as, for instance, myself—are rich in nothing *but* health. Have you never remarked that there is a class of English people who seem to have been created solely to pass their summers in the Canton de Vaud? That little widow there opposite to us—the one with the two daughters—knows every pension, I do believe, for thirty miles around, and she declares that this is the most endurable of them all."

"How lovely her daughters are!" I exclaimed, a new direction given to my thoughts by the winsome faces thus suddenly pointed out to me.

"Tell her that and you will win her heart!" said my loquacious companion. "Her pride in her children is intense, though she does her best to hide it. She is one of your inscrutable North of Ireland folk, full of queer, warped pride and warm affections, and a bristling reserve. If you praise her girls, she looks a trifle drier and stonier, and takes an early opportunity of rendering you some service."

"You seem to be a student of human nature," I observed, amused.

"My gossip shocks you, perhaps?" quickly asked Miss Lowndes, for that, as I afterwards discovered, was her name.

"By no means!" I answered. (Had I been frank, reader, I should have replied that I adored gossip!) "On the contrary, I should

like you to tell me something more. Who is the foreign gentleman on the other side of you, who appears so attentive to the most striking of the beauties?"

"Oh, that," said my neighbour, lowering her voice and looking a little grave, "is a Russian prince. His name is Sobranowski. He is a married man. His wife is not returned yet from her walk. Yes—as you say—he is *very* attentive. People have sometimes even talked. But occasionally he transfers his attentions for a day or two to the youngest daughter, the little dark one. I don't think *she* cares about them much. But the other is a regular flirt. Pretty creature! It is perhaps not to be wondered at. But her mother ought to make her draw the line at married men—don't you think?"

"Certainly," I replied briefly, but a little coldly. I liked gossip, but was careful always to object to scandal.

"That is what I say," continued Miss Lowndes with renewed briskness, apparently taking my curt answer for cordial assent. "But she is one of those mothers who think that their children have a birthright of impeccability in great things—is Mrs. Laybourne."

"Laybourne!" I exclaimed. "Did you say Laybourne?"

"I did," answered Miss Lowndes, with obvious interest in my eagerness.

"And," I continued, "the youngest daughter—what is her Christian name? Do you happen to know?"

"Her Christian name is Rita."

"Kate!" I said, turning rapidly to my sister, "do you see that girl opposite?"

"The brilliant blonde who rattles away at such a rate in French?" asked Kate.

"No—no!" said I, impatiently, "the smaller one with big, black eyes and wavy chestnut hair, and a pale, sweet, rather wistful face."

"What a poetical description!" replied Kate, with a good-humoured sarcasm that was habitual to her. "Yes! I see the young lady. Have you constructed one of your usual elephants concerning her? She looks a little grave. Have you made up your mind that she writes sonnets? Supposing she should turn out to be only dyspeptic!"

"You are very witty," said I, majestically. "It must be the mountain air. I have heard of its having a surprising effect on some constitutions."

"Ah! You must be taken seriously, I see," said my sister. "So—who is the girl?"

"Jack Laybourne's cousin."

Kate sat suddenly bolt upright in her chair, as if she had been pulled erect with a string. "*The* cousin?" she asked breathlessly.

I nodded.

"Good gracious! What a pity Jack is not here," was her next remark in a voice of genuine regret.

"There are railways and an international post," I said oracularly. "Before the week is out I shall have managed to get Jack here."

"You are a wonderful woman," said Kate. "I believe you could work even a greater miracle than to inveigle a British officer into a pension where there are not half a dozen men and the dinner is at one."

"The only thing is, we shall have to stay here ourselves until Jack has proposed," I remarked, thoughtfully.

"Then," answered Kate in a resigned tone, "we must devoutly hope that he will be quick about it."

You must know, reader, that Jack Laybourne was, so to speak, a protégé of ours. Not that he was poor, for he was in actual receipt of two thousand a-year, and potential possessor of many thousands more: nor weak, for he was six-feet-one, and broad-shouldered and bronzed by tropic suns: nor feckless, for he was a gallant, dashing soldier, and a fine fellow in every way. But, notwithstanding all this, we considered ourselves to some extent responsible for his destiny, and we were very anxious to prevent his spoiling it.

His father, Edward Laybourne, a man of dogged and sturdy Northumbrian type, was the son of a working man, who by toil and energy had risen to independence and even wealth. For a long time Edward was his only child, the others having died in infancy.

At last, when Edward was fifteen, another son was born and christened Charles; but it was such a puny, sickly creature as to cause recurrent surprise to everybody as the weeks lengthened into months and found it still alive. "Everybody" said, however, that it would never get through its teething; and its father was so convinced of the truth of this prophecy, that in speaking of his family he invariably ignored the baby altogether, and, finally, died quite suddenly without making the smallest provision for it. Barring a none too liberal annuity to his wife, the whole of his property was bequeathed to Edward, in whose future energy and business talents he expressed the utmost faith.

That this faith was amply justified later circumstances proved, for on the foundation of his father's wealth Edward, by the age of forty, had built up a mighty fortune; and in his neighbourhood (which was also ours) he enjoyed the fame and influence of a social potentate. The idea of associating his brother in his riches never seems to have occurred to him for a moment. He sent the boy to an expensive school, bought him later a commission in a crack regiment, and made him a munificent allowance.

Charles Laybourne, on his side, appeared quite contented with his condition of financial dependence, and perfect harmony reigned between the brothers until one fatal year when they fell in love with the same woman. This was Alice Kynge, the daughter of an ancient but impoverished house, whose family had persuaded her to engage herself to the wealthy manufacturer. If not happy, she was resigned, until she and Charles discovered that a warmer feeling than fraternal

affection had grown up between them. Loyalty and honour might have been eventually triumphant over passion had not the secret of the lovers been betrayed to Edward by an anonymous letter, informing him of the one clandestine meeting which they had allowed themselves. A scene of the most violent description was the result ; and Edward so overwhelmed the offenders with insult and abuse as to render futile the subsequent attempts of friends to bring about a reconciliation. Charles, deprived henceforth of all pecuniary assistance from his brother, married Alice, and exchanged into a regiment under orders for the West Indies. Here his young wife succumbed in a very short time to the climate, and he, after three years or so of lonely misery, married the widow of a brother-officer, with a tiny daughter and the modicum of an income. And five years before my meeting with his daughter Rita he had died—poor to the last and the victim of a lingering disease.

Edward had also married. His angry vanity was soothed, at the time of Alice's desertion, by the astute attentions of a lady, no longer young, and allied to the noble family from which the bride-elect sprang. The marriage was not happy, and Edward, disappointed and embittered, conceived a vehement hatred against the "pampered aristocrats" whom he considered incapable of appreciating him. On the death of his wife he severed himself completely from her kindred, and jealously debarred them from all intercourse with his boy. He became a violent Radical, and lost no opportunity of defending every incendiary social theory of which the application could not interfere with his personal well-being. His great subject was the selfishness of family claims. Thunders of applause greeted him at working-men's meetings, when he announced that he could easily conceive himself "disinheriting the mere individual, his son, in the interest of the glorious entity—Humanity."

We were the Laybournes' nearest neighbours, and during his mother's lifetime we had always seen a great deal of Jack. As a curly-headed little boy, in the days when Kate and I were still in the school-room, he was the constant playfellow of certain infant nephews and nieces of ours. Jack was a stalwart young officer, still in the first pride of his epaulets, and one of these same nieces, Lily, was a pretty, delicate girl of eighteen when the old playfellows met once more, and, unfortunately—fell in love ! The situation would perhaps be more accurately described by saying that Lily fell in love with Jack, and the young man, shy and secretly ardent, gave himself up very willingly to be worshipped. He had been starved of affection all his life, poor fellow ! for his mother had cared little for anybody but herself, and his father, uneasily conscious, I suppose, of a certain superiority of nature in the lad, carped at him perpetually as a "fine gentleman." It may easily be imagined what was Edward Laybourne's rage on hearing that his son had engaged himself to the penniless scion of an aristocratic stock. He raved like a madman—with the

only effect, of course, of causing Jack to think that Lily was absolutely indispensable to his happiness.

In the midst of all this our niece fell ill; was pronounced, alas! consumptive, and ordered to the Riviera for the winter. Kate, Jack and I went with her. But we had not been at San Remo many weeks when a telegram summoned Jack to the death-bed of his father. The old man was already unconscious when his son arrived, and he died a few hours afterwards. On his will being opened, it was found that his last act had been of a nature difficult to define—whether as one of malignant caprice or of tardy and imperfect justice. A codicil offered three alternatives to Jack. To marry Lily and see all his father's money go to various associations for the regeneration of society. To renounce Lily and enjoy a life-interest of £2,000 a-year in the property, of which the bulk should be applied to the foundation of a Working-Man's University. Or, finally, at the end of those ten years, or at any time within that period, to marry his cousin Rita Laybourne and enter into full possession of the paternal estate.

This astounding will amazed the country side. Several people sought to explain it by senile dementia, and advised Jack to dispute it. But this he refused to do, seeing nothing in the document inconsistent with his father's character.

As soon as the will was read, Jack, of course, wrote to Lily declaring his immutable resolve to marry her if she would consent to share his poverty. A secret theory of mine concerning my niece's character gained confirmation from her mode of receiving the news of her lover's fortunes. For two days she was quite silent on the subject, and then she remarked that she would not like to be a hindrance to Jack's career. The sentiment was unimpeachable, and was most prettily expressed. Why then did I feel that in so speaking she was thinking less of Jack than of herself?

I fancy that he, with the quick instinct of a loving heart, had the same impression; for I saw a grieved look in his eyes after his first interview with his little fiancée on his return. But they never came to any rupture, for, as the winter wore on, it was evident that our Lily was dying. She of course did not think so, but clung to the hope of recovery with all the pathetic faith of the consumptive.

"In the spring—when I am well—we will talk of marriage," she would say to Jack. "But for the present, remember, we have given one another up."

But in the early southern spring, when the tulips brightened all the fields where the anemones had bloomed before them, our Lily dropped and died. Her hand was in Jack's at the last, but she had been very cold to him in those latter days; and I think he felt, as he stood by her grave, that touching as was the early extinction of the gentle young life, yet her death had probably saved him from the experience of a deeper pain.

He went abroad again immediately, and we had not seen him for three years. Now he was in England once more, for his regiment had been ordered home, and we had been looking forward with great delight to meeting him in a month or so at the house of a mutual friend in Scotland. Kate and I—like the true women we were—never could think of Edward Laybourne's will without a pang of regret at the fine fortune probably lost to his son. For Fate ordains things in such a crooked way as to render it very likely that, if ever the cousins met, they would find one another mutually repulsive. We had often wondered what Rita Laybourne was like: we feared she might be commonplace, and we were almost positive she was hideous. And one day, when laughing, I said that if we ever saw her, we should find her disfigured by a hump or a squint, Kate gravely answered that for her part she should be thankful if it were no worse. Hence our excitement when we found ourselves face to face with the object of all this speculation.

That night, before going to bed, I wrote to Jack telling him (Heaven forgive me!) that Kate's health and mine required us to make a longer sojourn in Switzerland than we had anticipated. This would prevent, I added, our fulfilling the promise we had made to meet him in Scotland; as in another fortnight we were due in Wales at the house of an aged and invalid aunt. Under these circumstances, I begged him to take a run over to see us. And I described our actual quarters in terms of such imaginative enthusiasm that the landlord himself, could he have read my letter, would have gone raving mad with amazement and delight.

II.

JACK—dear, warm-hearted fellow—answered by return of post that he would join us as quickly as possible. I set myself in the interval before his arrival to cultivate the acquaintance of his aunt and her daughters. It was not very easy work. The mother was just what my shrewd acquaintance, Miss Lowndes, had described her—a stiff, dry little Irishwoman, who was only to be thawed at all by some praise of her children. Of these Rita, who, of course, alone interested me seriously, was a little shy. But her timidity was winsome rather than otherwise, for it had no awkwardness about it, and seemed to be on the surface merely. She showed frequent flashes of decision and character, in which I recognised the Laybourne blood. She had a soft voice and graceful ways, and, though generally a thought too grave for such a mere lassie, she had a sweet, fresh laugh, like a merry child's. Altogether I was greatly attracted by her, though rendered uneasy at times by a circumstance presently to be mentioned.

The eldest girl, Gertrude Cameron, had little thought but for her

flirtations. As far as Prince Sobranowski was concerned, these, though intermittent, were sufficiently marked to bring down upon her the facile censure of the pension. All the women wondered why "the mother did not interfere."

But Mrs. Laybourne evidently never dreamed of thinking that her beautiful eldest-born was not more than a match for a phalanx of Lovelaces. Moreover, she was not, I think, insensible to the triumph of seeing a prince (though he was only a Muscovite one) at her darling's pretty feet.

As for the distinguished foreigner himself, he knew what he was about extremely well, and combined fascination with prudence to a degree that I have never seen equalled. Just when he had brought things to such a pass with one sister as to banish sleep from the pillows of the most virulent among our scandalised spinsters, he would suddenly make a complete transfer of his attentions to the other. On such occasions, reader, I became all eyes and ears—of course in the interests of Jack.

But my little Rita was so quiet that, although I thought she shrank from Sobranowski, I never could be quite sure. And another person who, it struck me, was as puzzled as myself, was the Russian's wife.

The Princess was a podgy, pretty little woman, with bright watchful eyes like a bird's. Into these glancing orbs there leapt occasionally a spark of very human anger, as they roved from one of the fair sisters to the other. I imagine the poor thing had no very happy life of it with her brilliant spouse; but used her vigilant jealousy with some effect at times to keep him a little within bounds. I hated the man, and felt a great temptation often to warn Rita against him. But I feared that with so young a girl the interference of a stranger might do more harm than good; and I understood how difficult it was for her in her inexperience to ward off the skilful and subtle, but never intrusive, attentions of a consummate flirt. But I longed very much for Jack to come: and at last he did.

We were nearly all in the garden, looking out, as usual, for the diligence which brought, not only the hotel its guests, but the guests themselves their letters. The sound of its jingling bells was the most welcome one of the day to our famished ears.

Who so pleased as my sister and I when on the top of the vehicle we saw a stalwart form, and discerned a white-teethed smile of welcome, in a bronzed and manly countenance further set off by the candid folds of a puggeree?

We met with such enthusiasm that for ten minutes all the lady spectators' heads wagged with curiosity and excitement.

"Come!" I said boldly, after I had shaken hands. "We are not the only people from whom you are to receive a welcome here. Unless I am much mistaken, here is your aunt, Mrs. Laybourne," and I led him up to that lady.

The widow turned livid with excitement. I had purposely said nothing to her of Jack's coming, thinking it best that it should take both her and Rita by surprise; and it was evident from her emotion now, that I had not miscalculated the strength of her interest in this—her first meeting with her nephew.

Jack for an instant was also disconcerted, but he soon recovered, and wrung his aunt's hand with a warmth that left little to be desired on the score of cordiality.

"Me daughters!" said Mrs. Laybourne faintly. "Rita—Gertrude."

"So this is Rita!" remarked Jack—not very brilliantly, it must be confessed—and his kindly smile became a little constrained, while his glance rested with a troubled though gentle expression, first on the slender white fingers that lay in his sinewy palm, and next on the graceful little head that just reached to his shoulder.

The child was sedate—but that was all the better. She murmured a few words of greeting, and only the faint flush that mounted to her cheek betrayed that she was more moved than usual.

"We have so often wished to know you," said the beauty who next advanced, smiling, gracious, bewitching, with a black velvet toque on her golden hair, and a bunch of gentianellas in the waistband of her white dress.

"You are very kind!" exclaimed Jack quite earnestly, and immensely struck. So struck indeed that for that first evening I trembled lest all my plans should melt into thin air—dissolved by the sparkle of Gertrude Cameron's eyes. And Mrs. Laybourne must have been pursued by the same fear, for the serene apathy with which she generally regarded her girls' proceedings completely deserted her, and she made various well-meaning, but particularly clumsy attempts to divert Jack's attention from her elder, and transfer it to her younger daughter. In these efforts she was, sooth to say, seconded by neither of these; and I noted the delicate reserve of Rita's manner with increasing approbation.

The next morning Mrs. Laybourne was evidently still in a state of suppressed excitement, and on hearing that a large party of us, including Jack and her daughters, were starting for a climb, she announced her intention of accompanying us. I heard Rita vainly urging her not to do so, and recalling the advice of some doctor in Paris. But her mother was obstinate, and joined us, keeping a sharp eye on Gertrude.

Our destination was a lake, high up among the mountains. The path to it was long and very steep, winding through fir-woods and past green sloping meadows. As one toiled upwards the flora gradually changed, until the presence all around of the deep red Alpine rhododendron revealed the region where winter and spring had still wrestled for dominion, while the corn began to ripen in the valleys, and the tiny cups of the lilac-blossom strewed our garden-

walk. And even yet, in these middle July days, the snow lay in a dazzling sheet round the lake, whose upper surface was frozen hard, while below the ice the water slumbered in translucent depths of intensest blue. Our bald disjointed chat was silenced for a moment by the pure, mysterious air, and the stillness of the solitude was unbroken but for the cawing of some rooks in a clump of firs below. The valley was filled with gleaming silver mist; to the right rose the long, sharp ridge of the Dent du Midi, amethyst-hued, and in the far distance stretched the noble line of the Savoy Alps—the rose of morning still upon their glittering crests.

"Isn't it pretty?" said a young lady.

"Ain't it jolly, just!" remarked an appreciative youth.

And so the spell was broken. The young people began to snow-ball one another, and the elders scrambled about as well as their respective years would allow them, and gathered wild flowers.

"Oh mother! Look at mother!" suddenly cried Rita, in a sharp tone of terror, and sprang to Mrs. Laybourne's side.

The widow had sunk upon the ground in a sitting posture, and, deadly pale, with her hand pressed to her side, was painfully gasping for breath.

"Oh! please let her have air!" said Rita imploringly, as everybody gathered round in consternation. "It is her heart. She should never have taken this walk."

Of course everybody had a suggestion to make. The English offered to fetch wine, and the foreigners eau sucrée.

"Somebody must go to the nearest chalet and fetch a chair and find two men to carry her down in it," said Rita rapidly, and with clear decision.

I was struck, even at that moment, by her self-control and tone of instinctive authority.

Jack and several others went off for the chair and the men, all of which were soon there. Mrs. Laybourne, very slowly and with infinite precautions, was conveyed to the pension, and there carried to her room. Her daughters installed themselves beside her. A doctor was sent for from Sepey, and the pension inmates stood about in consternated little groups until he arrived. He ordered quiet, and did not conceal the possibility of danger.

This incident dashed everybody's spirits, and, to make matters worse, the next day the weather broke and for about a week the most dismal dulness reigned. We had nothing to do but enquire a dozen times a-day after the invalid, and watch the storms sweep up the valley.

It was magnificent to see the huge mass of drenched mist and sulphurous cloud roll onwards, reft at rapidly recurring intervals by the swift scimitar of the lightning; but I venture to think that the most poetically attuned soul grows weary of a thunderstorm which lasts a week. At the Hôtel du Sceptre, at any rate, almost every-

body grew sick of the sight of almost everybody else's face. Jack was horribly bored, but he felt that it was his duty to wait and see if his aunt recovered. He consequently borrowed all the books in the house, and smoked like a factory chimney.

But even Alpine rain stops some time; and there finally dawned a day when brilliant sunshine once more illumined hill and dale. On the same occasion Mrs. Laybourne was pronounced convalescent.

Late in the afternoon, finding myself well-nigh alone in the house, through almost everybody having gone for an excursion, I started for an "airing" before supper.

There was a chalet high on a rise behind the house, whither at sunset I usually betook myself for a cup of warm milk. A winding and very gradual ascent led to it. The greater portion of this walk was visible from the house, but there was one part, planted with trees and furnished with rustic seats, which was quite hidden from the windows of the hotel, although the ground above commanded a full view of it. To this retreat I directed my steps, and on arriving there I found Rita Laybourne. I had hardly exchanged a dozen words with her for a week, and was consequently quite glad to see her. Nevertheless, it instantly became evident to me that she by no means returned the compliment. When I came upon the scene she had been standing with her back towards me, apparently intent on watching something in a meadow adjoining—which meadow, I should mention, could be reached by a *détour* from the back exit of the hotel. At the sound of my step she started, turned, and regarded me with a disturbed and annoyed air. I swept the meadow with an enquiring glance, but detected nothing alive in it save a couple of jackdaws on a tree. Not much enlightened by this discovery, I fixed my eyes on Rita's embarrassed face. "I thought you were not coming out," she exclaimed, with a kind of desperate bluntness. I remembered then that, after dinner, she had taken an opportunity of asking me, as I thought, casually, if I meant to join the walkers, and I had answered that I had letters to write and should not stir from my rooms until supper-time. Puzzled by her manner now, and a little resentful of it, I replied curtly, "I changed my mind," and so speaking I installed myself with great deliberation on a bench.

"Are—are you going to remain here?" questioned Rita, not even taking the trouble to conceal her dismay.

I stared at her with the utmost astonishment.

"Won't you go for the milk?" persisted the girl, beginning nervously to furl and unfurl her parasol. "They are milking the cow now, I think. The girls went by with the pails twenty minutes ago."

"And supposing I don't wish for any milk to-day—what then?" I retorted sharply. Why on earth did she wish to get rid of me? I was becoming more heated and suspicious every minute. Instead of answering me immediately, Rita gave another glance in the direction of the meadow; then, with a quick movement of her

person, masked the view of it from me. It was plain that she had seen someone coming. *Who* could it be? Jack was gone with the walkers; so, as far as I knew, was that hateful Prince; in fact, the only member of the male sex left at home was the parson, whose respectable grey head I had just seen at his own bedroom-window. Surely Rita had not made an assignation with *him*?

"You have not answered my question, Miss Laybourne," I observed glacially. "May I request to know the cause of your sudden kind interest in my milk-drinking?" To my horror, Rita burst into tears. "Good heavens!" I exclaimed, rising.

"Oh, please go! dear Miss Greville, please go!" said the poor little soul, checking her sobs with a violent effort and clasping her slender hands entreatingly. "I am not doing any harm—indeed I am not. But there is somebody coming whom I must speak to—*and alone.*"

"Of course, I will go if you wish it," I said slowly, softened by her distress. At the same time I tried hard to see into the meadow, although in vain; Rita—naturally—not being transparent.

"And you won't look back? Promise me you won't look back," continued my companion, more and more excited.

"What do you take me for?" I cried irritably. "I am not in the habit, Miss Laybourne, of prying into my neighbours' concerns—whatever their nature."

Having delivered myself of this boast, I flatter myself that I walked off with a very successful assumption of insulted dignity. But to be frank with you, reader, I own that neither Lot's wife nor Bluebeard, nor Psyche at midnight, nor Orpheus leaving Hades, nor anybody else since the world began, ever endured such tortures of unsatisfied curiosity as I. Puzzled and angry I dragged my leaden feet along, envying each bird as it flew and each grasshopper as it leapt in the direction of that forbidden arbour. As I neared the last rise of all, where there was a seat, I, though not the least tired, felt aggrieved to think that I could not even rest there without looking straight down upon Rita. What, then, was my agitation, on coming upon the bench, to find that it was already occupied by no less a person than Princess Sobranowski. This fact in itself, not so very novel, was rendered remarkable by her expression and her attitude. For—crouching forward with clenched hands, frenzied eyes and distended nostrils—she was absorbed in contemplation of—the *arbour!* There was no doubting the direction of her fixed glance, and my heart nearly jumped into my mouth. The instant she perceived me, she gave a short laugh, with scant amusement in its tones—a laugh of fury! "Tenez, madame," she said, without altering her position or removing her eyes from it, "I am glad you are come. Look and see what your immaculate English mees are capable of!"

What would you have done, reader? *I looked!* And there was the Prince holding Rita's hands, drawing her towards him as she

shrank back, shaking his head, stamping his foot, and indulging in every manifestation of excitement and entreaty! As he advanced, she retreated; as she tried to free her hands, he took them in both his own; as she averted her face, he bent so low before her that I thought the next moment would see him on his knees at her feet.

These movements were repeated several times, the actors in the scene, meanwhile, becoming so excited that their voices, although not their words, were audible to us. Madame Sobranowski all this time was keeping up a running fire of sardonic commentary: "C'est ça! hold her hand—she pretends to timidity—ah, la coquine!—not wicked only, but expert—What a charming tableau!—my husband is eloquent!—doubtless he weeps, the crocodile!—he had best not kneel—he is getting fat, it won't be so easy to rise!—cette mees!—cette candide jeune fille! How well she leads him on! His prayers enchant her—I wonder how long she wishes him to continue!—I should like to hear him—it would be an agreeable novelty!—Grand ciel! quel supplice!" Her voice rose almost to a shriek as she pronounced the last word, and the sound of it must have reached the ears of the couple below. For they looked up, and then started apart as if shot.

Flinging out her hands with a gesture of despair that was absolutely dramatic, Miss Laybourne turned and fled like a startled hare. The Prince made one step after her; thought better of it, glanced upwards, and, with marvellous impudence, lifted his hat to his wife and me! Then, jauntily replacing this, he thrust one hand in a *dégagé* manner in his pocket, and proceeded slowly to mount in our direction.

The fat Princess, with inconceivable agility, started off to meet him, as red in the face as a turkey-cock, and gobbling very like one. To my ears, of course, there was nothing but sound and fury in her rapid string of Russian expletives, but it is certain I should be doing these a great injustice if I hinted that they signified nothing! My heated imagination now suggested that the only possible next act to the drama would be the scratching out of the Prince's eyes at the hands of his outraged consort. Not being anxious to assist at this catastrophe, I too turned tail, but in an opposite direction, fleeing upwards to the *chalet*. Arrived there, I mechanically drank off my glass of milk—it would be difficult truly to say *why*. I should have drained a cup of hemlock just then with about as much consciousness of what I was doing. But I suppose it was a relief to do anything. And then I went home, hurried to my own room and sat down to think.

As calm returned to me, better ideas regarding Rita presented themselves. She had distinctly said, on begging me to leave her, that she was doing no harm. It was evident from her attitude throughout the whole interview with the Russian that she had listened to him with reluctance and refused him some request. What this request might be I was at

a loss, on any favourable hypothesis, to imagine; but it occurred to me once or twice that it might have some relation to Gertrude. It is true, this view did not afford me any very great consolation, for what right or justification could Rita have to aid or abet in any way her sister's flirtations? And that she was not discouraging them seemed plain from her manner towards the Prince, which, though agitated and cold, had not been angry. I could make nothing of the business, and was quite worn out with perplexity when summoned down to tea.

The walkers had returned tired, talkative, with blistered faces and voracious appetites. I took my seat at the table; Jack, who divided Kate and me, was already on one side of me; the still empty chair (I wished it could never have been filled again!) of Prince Sobranowski on the other. Presently Rita, who sat opposite to me, glided to her seat, bowing to me, at the same time, with a timid but deprecating rather than guilty air. Gertrude did not appear, as Mrs. Laybourne could not yet be left alone. Next, with his usual martial step, in marched the Prince. *His* manner was slightly amused and sarcastic. He was humming an operatic air in a low, unconcerned tone, and had the effrontery to break off in that occupation to wish me "Bon soir!" Somebody enquired if Madame Sobranowski were not coming. "My wife is not very well," said the wretch composedly. "She suffers sometimes from the nerves." Several people expressed sympathy at this announcement; but their condolences had hardly left their lips, when a door opened violently, and the very invalid in question bounced in. She swept up to the table, and took her place without a word. Traces of recent commotion were still upon her face, while the quiver of her lips, and the smouldering fire of her eyes, showed that very little would suffice to provoke a fresh explosion.

"It strikes me," remarked Jack, confidentially, "that our amiable foreign friends have been indulging in some conjugal amenities. The Prince must have a roughish time of it on such occasions—don't you think?"

"Yes, indeed!" I answered fervently, remembering my afternoon's experience. "We cannot call *her* winds and waters sighs and tears—any more than Cleopatra's."

"We were afraid we should not have the pleasure of seeing you this evening, Princess," said Jack, speaking across me politely, to my infinite alarm. "Monsieur Sobranowski led us to fear that you were unwell."

"I am very *ill*, monsieur," answered the Princess, furiously. "But I chose to come down."

"For heaven's sake, hold your tongue!" I whispered imploringly to Jack, who turned purple in his efforts not to laugh.

At this moment Miss Lowndes, I could not but think with some slight secret malice, observed across the table to Rita: "I am going

away to-morrow, positively, and shall call upon you this evening to fulfil your old promise of performing for me a Russian dance with Prince Sobranowski."

I expected the Princess to hurl her plate at the audacious speaker, but she only gave a kind of angry growl, like the low roar of a caged lioness.

"It must be impossible for an English girl to do that kind of thing well," said I abruptly, a remark of which the implied rudeness caused everybody to stare at me.

"Mademoiselle Rita was taught by a Russian, I understand," remarked Sobranowski suavely. "You need consequently be under no fear, chère dame, of your accomplished nation not being successfully as well as charmingly represented."

Of course, I hoped Rita would decline to perform the dance; but after a very little hesitation she consented. We had two salons, one large, the other small. The latter communicated with the first by a door over which was draped a velvet portière. Everybody came into the larger room to look on at the dancers. I, the usual musician, was asked to play a polonaise of Chopin; but on my flat refusal, somebody else was found to do it. At the first notes the Princess, who was livid, abruptly left the room. To my vague alarm, I noticed—and I think I alone noticed—that she reappeared immediately in the small salon, and with a stealthy step and furtive air hid herself in the shadow of the curtain, and, from thence, watched the proceedings.

I had never seen a "Russian" dance before, so I do not know how to call the one I witnessed then. But I fancy it was only a kind of polonaise danced by two people instead of by many.

Rita, with one hand on her hip, and her face upturned to her partner's, danced round in a measured step. Sobranowski, bending his head above her with a devotional air, clasped her other hand in his left, while with his right he executed a pantomime descriptive of admiration and entreaty. They both marked the time with a recurrent clack of their heels, and quickened the pace somewhat as the dance went on. Rita, with parted lips and flushed cheeks, looked unusually pretty. Her slight figure made a charming contrast to the tall frame and gallant bearing of the Prince.

They had been three or four times round, and found themselves exactly opposite the inner drawing-room door, when one of the sharp stops so characteristic of the polonaise occurred. At the same moment Sobranowski dropped on one knee and raised Rita's hand to his lips. This was the end of the performance, and everybody burst into applause. But at the same moment, and above the clapping of hands, rang out a sudden, shrill yell of execration. And just as the Russian was preparing to rise, with a spring like a panther his wife was upon him.

"Donnez! donnez! Infame! The letter! I will have the letter!"

she shrieked, in maniacal tones, keeping her husband down with one hand and clutching wildly at Rita with the other. The girl, as white as death, got away from her and retreated to the other end of the room. We, looking on in mute amazement, could see no letter, but noticed that she kept her left hand pressed tightly down among the folds of her dress. The Prince, meanwhile, had at last succeeded in leaping to his feet, and now seized his frenzied, struggling wife by the wrist—holding her so and (I really think) swearing at her in Russian.

"*I will see that letter!*" cried the poor woman in French, making frantic efforts to free herself, and beginning to sob like an angry child. "Madame! speak to that girl!" (this to me). "Monsieur! (turning to Jack) you are her cousin: will you encourage her in this infamy?"

Jack, like every other spectator of this extraordinary scene, had stood till now dumbfounded. At the Princess's appeal, however, he roused himself with a kind of start, and did the best thing that could be done under the circumstances. Advancing towards Rita, he said, with ready tact, and in a grave but not severe manner: "I feel sure that this is all much ado about nothing. But as Princess Sobranowski is so excited, you had better surrender this letter—if letter it be. Give it to me, and I will tear it up before your eyes."

"No! no!" interposed Madame Sobranowski, vehemently. "You shall not tear it up. I must read it."

"It is my cousin's property, madame, and without her permission nobody can read it," said Jack, coldly. The Princess, wilder than ever with baffled rage, was again about to protest, when Rita, for the first time, spoke: "Somebody must read the letter," she said in clear, low tones. "I cannot rest under the aspersion which Princess Sobranowski has cast upon me."

"Then let *me* read it," cried Jack eagerly.

"But it is to be a secret—mind!" said Rita, with a curious mixture of girlish naïveté and proud determination. "If you are satisfied that I am blameless, that must be enough for everybody." And she laid a little pink missive in his hands. Jack walked with it to the lamp and unfolded it, amid a breathless silence, only broken by the weeping of the Princess, who had subsided into a jelly-like heap on the sofa, and was indulging in hysterical tears.

The note was apparently very brief, for Jack's eye travelled down it in a moment. Without a word, he deliberately refolded it; extracted his portemonnaie, placed the letter inside it, put his hands into his pockets, and—faced the tantalised spectators with the most unconcerned air in the world!

"I trust that you are content, monsieur!" observed the Prince, with an uneasy laugh.

"Perfectly so," answered Jack. "Miss Greville, won't you play

the 'Blue Danube'? Rita, I insist upon your waltzing with me: you are positively the colour of a sheet."

And in another five minutes all the younger people were dancing, and everybody else was digesting as well as each one could the respective emotions of curiosity, agitation, or rage evoked by the just-enacted scene.

The next morning, as Kate was looking out of our sitting-room window, she suddenly called to me, "Look here!"

I looked, and there were our two young people, Jack and Rita, walking up and down the garden absorbed in confidential conversation!

"Let us make haste to finish our breakfast and go down to them," said Kate, with the frankest curiosity. And so we did.

"I am glad you are come," cried Jack brightly, advancing to meet us. "I have persuaded Rita—though with a great deal of trouble—to let me put *you*, if no one else, into the secret of last night's scene. It is necessary for her own sake that somebody should know the truth; so you had better begin by reading this famous note, which will explain everything to you," and he gave us the fatal pink missive.

I opened it eagerly, and Kate read it over my shoulder. It was in French, and translated ran thus:

"*MADemoisELLE*,—I will do as you desire; but I supplicate you to afford me a few hours' respite. I honour your sentiments both as regards the respectable lady, your mother, and your—alas!—too lovely sister. My heart is broken. Nevertheless, I will obey you. Only to-morrow it is impossible, and you must bear with me a brief space longer. You are young, *mademoiselle*, and though so intelligent and, permit me to add, so fair, you are inexperienced in the ways of the world. Yet you must know that without money the most heroic enterprises fail. Consequently, to accomplish the great sacrifice you impose upon me, and which I, although anguished, accept, I must be allowed to remain here until the prosaic arrival of Thursday's post. I present my respectful homage.

"PRINCE SOBRANOWSKI."

"Of course you understand the mountebank's little game!" remarked Jack, with an air of ineffable disgust, as I handed the letter back to him.

"He had been carrying on for some time with Miss Cameron a flirtation that assumed at last quite serious proportions. Rita, here" (there was certainly a new inflection of tenderness in Jack's voice as he mentioned his little cousin's name) "had several times shown her disapprobation, and then the fellow had exerted himself to pacify and deceive her, by protesting his great esteem, his unalterable respect, and all the rest of it. But Rita began to suspect that there was even a clandestine correspondence going on, and yesterday she

acquired proof of it, for she met Justine, the little housemaid, in the passage, looking rather guilty and hastily trying to pocket a letter to Prince Sobranowski in Miss Cameron's handwriting. That young lady, on being remonstrated with, showed herself most violent and reckless of consequences. She protested that there was no harm in the correspondence, which had only been resorted to because Princess Sobranowski's 'senseless jealousy' made all pleasant conversation with her husband impossible. Rita asked to be allowed, under these circumstances, to read some of the innocuous productions, but with the sole result of increasing her sister's excitement. Determined then to put an end to the affair at any cost, and not daring to agitate her mother, she found out Sobranowski, and insisted upon his meeting her yesterday afternoon in the harbour, where she hoped to be able to speak to him undisturbed by stranger eyes or ears, and unnoticed, above all, by his wife. She chose the hour when Mrs. Laybourne least needed her, but, being pressed for time, as well as agitated by her previous scene with her sister, she betrayed, on meeting you, Miss Greville, there, a distress of mind which she felt must have given you a very false impression. The rest you know."

"But," said Kate, with her practical curiosity, "I do not yet understand quite what Sobranowski thought he would gain by his note to Rita, nor why he should have chosen that clumsy way of conveying it to her."

"As to that," answered Jack, "it is obvious that the object of his note was simply to gain time. Rita—who seems capable of measures of quite an alarming energy," said the young man, with a smile: "Rita had declared to him that unless he cleared out of this the very first thing this morning, she would denounce him without mercy to his wife. I imagine that was a very alarming prospect. He probably hoped to avert it, and yet to be able to remain on by stipulating for three days' delay—three days in which he counted upon his eloquence to appease Rita and convince her of the groundlessness of her fears. As to the manner in which he gave the note, that is explicable on two hypotheses. Either he had had enough of trusting to housemaids, or he wished to force Rita to take it, which she would not have done had it been conveyed to her by a messenger."

"And what are you going to do?" I asked presently. We had tried, of course, like the gushing old maids we were, to pet Rita a little. But we had soon desisted, for it was evident the child did not like it. "What are you going to do?"

"Kick the beggar out of the house," responded Jack curtly.

"Alas! only metaphorically, I fear," said I laughing, "but in any case—go and do it."

Jack went. He reappeared shortly, looking very triumphant and rather pugnacious.

The Russian had talked at first about his honour, and suggested settling the matter with a pair of pistols. Jack, however, answered

that he should have the greatest objection to fight, but not the smallest one to horsewhip him. On this the Prince, probably mindful of his opponent's youth and inches, elected for a retreat in preference to a beating.

"He has sent down to Sepey to order a carriage, and before two hours he will be off. I told him that if letters came for him I would forward them to any address he liked to mention. But as he only smiled superciliously, it is clear that his pretended need of roubles was a flight of Calmuck fancy," wound up Jack.

"So he is really going," exclaimed Rita, adding gratefully to her cousin: "What should I have done without you?"

"You see, you want someone to protect you, for all your pluck," he replied, looking very much inclined to kiss her.

"The real truth is," said I, "that you ought to have put the matter in Jack's hands from the very first."

"Yes! Why didn't you? You know I am your cousin," observed Jack.

"You are my cousin, of course," said Rita, blushing rosy red.

"Well?" said the young man.

"Well?" said the young lady, and got no further.

"Jack, you are a greater goose than I always thought you," interposed Kate. "Anybody but a British officer, six-foot-two in his boots, would understand that you and Rita are *too much* cousins."

"Unfortunately we cannot make ourselves anything less," replied Jack, with much gravity. And the obvious rejoinder remained unspoken—for the moment.

But one evening about a week later, Rita and her cousin lingered so long in the starlit garden that my propriety took alarm, and I thought I would refresh myself by a little turn.

Jack no sooner caught sight of me than, to my infinite discomfiture, he darted forward and took me into a fervid embrace.

"I am sure I am very glad," I said, when the cause of this reception had been explained to me. "But, I own, I cannot guess why you should think it necessary to kiss *me*."

"I beg your pardon," said Jack, merrily. "You can surely, however, make allowance for a fellow who has just recovered his inheritance."



BETSY AND I ARE OUT.

DRAW up the papers, lawyer, and make them good and stout ;
 Things at home are cross-ways, and Betsy and I are out.
 We who have worked together so long as man and wife,
 Must pull in single harness the rest of our natural life.

"What is the matter?" say you. Ah well, that's hard to tell !
 Most of the years behind us have passed by fairly well ;
 I've loved no other woman—she no other man,
 But it seems we've lived together as long as we ever can.

So I have talked with Betsy, and Betsy has talked with me,
 And we have told each other we can never more agree.
 Not that we charge on the other any terrible crime ;
 But for years has this been gathering, a little at a time.

To begin with, there was temper : we both had that for a start—
 Though we never had suspected 'twould rend us two apart ;
 I had my various failings, bred in both heart and life ;
 And Betsy, like all quick women, was somewhat given to strife.

The first thing I remember on which we disagreed
 Was something concerning Heaven—a difference in our creed.
 We argued the thing at breakfast—we argued the thing at tea,
 And the more we argued the question, the less did we agree.

And the next that I remember was when we lost a cow ;
 She had died quite unexpectedly—the question was only—How ?
 I held to my own opinion, and Betsy another had ;
 And when we had done disputing, we both felt rather mad.

And the next fall-out that came, it was started in a joke ;
 But full a week it lasted, and we neither of us spoke.
 And the next was when I scolded because she broke a bowl ;
 And she said I was mean and stingy, and could not have any soul.

And that china bowl kept bringing dissensions in our cup ;
 And that poor old cow was always on each side coming up ;
 And the Heaven we argued so much about no nearer to us got,
 But it gave us a taste of something that surely of Heaven was *not*.

And so the thing kept working, lawyer, and always the self-same way ;
 Always something to argue, and something sharp to say :
 And in would come the neighbours, a contending army strong,
 And lend their kindest service to urge each side along.

And there have been days together—and many a weary week,
 When both of us were angry, and both too proud to speak :
 And I've been thinking and thinking, the whole of the Spring and Fall,
 If we can't live kindly together, why, better not live at all.

And so I have talked with Betsy, and Betsy has talked with me,
And we have agreed together, that we shall never agree ;
And what is hers shall be hers, and what is mine will be mine,
And you'll put that in the agreement, and give it to us to sign.

Write on the paper, lawyer—the very first paragraph—
Of all the farm and live-stock, that she shall take her half :
For she has helped to earn it, through many a weary day,
And it's nothing more than justice that Betsy should have her pay.

Give her the house and homestead—a man can go out and roam ;
But women are helpless creatures, unless they have their home.
And I have always determined, and never failed to say,
That Betsy should not want a home, when I was taken away.

There's a little handful of cash that brings in yearly pay ;
A few hundred pounds, or so, laid by for a rainy day :
It's safe in the hands of substantial men, and easy to get at ;
Put in another clause, if you please, and give her half of that.

Yes, I see that you smile, sir, at my giving her so much ;
I might have made lower terms ; but I take no stock in such.
True and fair I married her, when she was blithe and young,
And Betsy was always good to me, except that she had her tongue.

I then was young as you are, though not so smart, perhaps :
For me she threw over a lawyer, and other dandy chaps ;
And all of them were flustered, and fairly taken down,
And I for a time was counted the luckiest man in town.

Once, when I had a fever—I shall never forget the time—
I was not myself, I think, and my hands were like heated lime ;
Never a minute went by that Betsy was out of sight ;
She nursed me with tender care, and sat by me day and night.

And if ever a house was tidy, and ever rooms were bright,
Her house and rooms were always that, no matter how clear the light :
No, I do not complain of Betsy, or any of her acts,
Excepting when we've quarrelled, and told each other facts.

So draw up the draft of the deed, lawyer ; and I'll go home to-night,
And read the agreement to her, and see if she finds it right ;
And then I'll see about selling the half of the stock I keep ;
And out in the world I'll go, alone, and with weary feet.

And one thing put in the paper ; it before to me didn't occur :
That when she hears of my death she shall bring me back to her,
And lay me under the yew-tree I used to think so blithe
When she and I were happy, before we thought of strife.

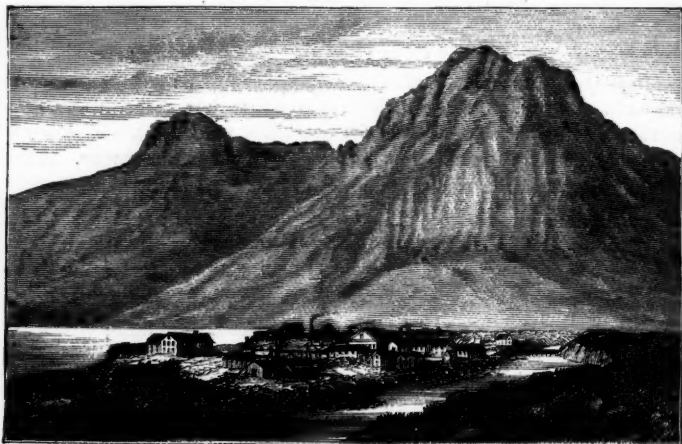
And when she dies herself, I'd ask her to lie by me,
And, lying together in silence, we doubtless must agree.
And when we meet in Heaven, we'd not perhaps think it queer
If we loved each other better, for that we have quarrelled here.

W. C.

ABOUT NORWAY.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND."

IT is a melancholy but very positive fact that the pleasure of a voyage to the North Cape is entirely made or marred by that most uncertain element, the weather. With cloudless skies and soft breezes, nothing can be more delightful than this winding about rocks, islands, and mainland, day after day; each day, each hour bringing fresh scenes of beauty and interest before the traveller: glimpses also of various people of the country, with the quiet occupations that form the even



SVOLVAER, IN THE LOFODENS.

tenour of their lives. Nothing can be grander or more sublime than the gorgeous sunsets which envelop earth, sea, and sky, until the very air seems to flash with myriads of rainbow-tinted hues, lovely and almost palpable to the touch.

And once within the Arctic Circle, the night that has no sunset, no darkness: where no longer "the evening and the morning" make a day: where night seems to have fled for ever, and eternal noon has risen upon the world: this, too, if it has its disadvantages, has also its special and rare charm. The days pass in a dream of beauty and glory. Watching the changing tints as the sun nears the horizon which it does not reach: watching again the subtle changes of tones as the sun suddenly shoots upwards and silently announces that its course is run: warning of the flight of time more mysteriously and surely than the midnight clang of iron that tolls from

some lofty tower its own sad tale: the mind thus occupied never grows weary of dwelling upon effects that will not shape themselves into words, for they are subtle as the chameleon, delicate as the bloom upon the wing of a butterfly, and seem to partake as little of earth as the rainbow itself.

Day after day, the same tones, the same glories meet the eye, but you are no more familiar with them than you were at the beginning, and you watch for them as eagerly and anxiously as when they first struck upon you with astonishment. At last you feel that, for a time, earth has been left behind: you have entered some celestial paradise, more beautiful than dream or imagination



HAMMERFEST.

ever pictured. So ethereal and unearthly is the whole effect that you dread lest a day or an hour should bring out of the east a cloud no bigger than a man's hand, which shall expand and cover the heavens, until all these glories give place to a sort of death in nature.

And the change comes. As you look back upon the dream of sunshine and beauty that has been with you day by day, and compare it with the desolate skies and black clouds, the bitter winds and drenching rains in which there is no dream, but a great deal of stern reality: despair falls upon the spirit, melancholy and weariness mark you for their own, and you long for the end.

So it was with us. On reaching the summit of the flat table-land of the North Cape which stretched around, covered with rein-

deer moss and rough gorse that sank in as we walked over it, had the wind only been in a contrary direction, instead of cutting hail and freezing cold we should have found a glorious sun, brilliant skies, stretches of Arctic sea glowing with reflected midnight tints, a warm, balmy air. But that unfortunate mirage, so beautiful in itself, had announced the fate that awaited us, and sad was the disappointment.

Nor did this untoward state of things cease with the North Cape, and the return journey became in consequence inexpressibly tedious. The fact of our vessel being as much a cargo as a passenger ship now grew unpleasantly apparent. Going up to the Cape, when everything was new and strange; every step of the way fresh ground, giving rise to a succession of rapid impressions; calling at the different stations had been not one of the least pleasant of the recurring incidents of the voyage. But now that cold and rain had succeeded warmth and sunshine, these frequent stoppages became wearisome to the last degree. And in returning, the ship seemed to have an unlimited amount of cargo to take on board, so that every now and then almost half a day would be lost at some small uninteresting station, whilst the hold was gradually being filled with dried stockfish, and the unhappy passengers were half poisoned with the smell that haunted them henceforth with too close a constancy: a familiarity that bred a very decided aversion.

We left the North Cape on the Thursday night: the word night being a mere manner of speech, for it was distinguished from the day only by the revolution of the hours, not by the alternations of light and darkness. And yet much that we now saw was in reality new ground: for, as far as was possible, the steamer was so timed that those places passed in the night in going were passed in the day in returning. Thus, had the weather only proved propitious, all would have been well. But Friday passed, and Saturday, and still the skies wept. Sunday morning was gloomy, but the deluge had ceased. Before some of us were up the ship stopped at Sandtorvholm, and most of the passengers had landed to inspect the church of Throndenaes in the neighbourhood: said to be one of the oldest and most curious churches in Norway. In about two hours' time, or rather more, they all returned enraptured with their excursion.

Have you ever observed, reader, that if anything is going on in which you have been accidentally left out: such for instance as a long-planned picnic, or an excursion like the present: everyone in returning, with malice prepense, will outvie everyone else in glowing descriptions of the irreparable loss you have sustained: until at last you are ready to send yourself to Coventry for your untoward fate, and your friends to Halifax for their too evident effort to excite your jealous regret. So it was in this instance. When the passengers had returned to deck, mounting the ladder with more or less dignity, according to the bent of each mind, all tongues were loosened in a

full chorus of praise of what they had seen and done: the charming road; the luxurious vegetation; the quaint church; the curious fish-faced people. One of the party, indeed, with the true ring of small venom in his voice, remarked that it was the most glorious walk he had ever enjoyed in the whole course of his existence. We were led to suppose that we had missed the very gem of the voyage. Perhaps the most amusing part of the whole thing was, that shortly before the return of the absentees, A. had said with a laugh: "Take notice that they will come back full of raptures, full of supreme pity for those who were left behind: we shall have missed the most glorious thing out." So when his words came to pass he turned with a quiet "I told you so."

But the glowing description so worked upon the feelings of the two American ladies that wailing and lamentation ensued on their part. Possessing, in their knowledge of human nature, the harmlessness of the dove but not the wisdom of the serpent, they accepted as literal and undisputed fact every word that was said, and were almost beside themselves with remorse. The Captain, who happened to be standing near them, could not resist their appeals and offered to land them in their turn. The ship was not yet ready to start; they might land, see the church, and go on to the further shore; whilst the vessel would round yonder point and put in to pick them up. This was very satisfactory, and too kind an offer to be refused. So the ladies hastily got ready, and being unprotected, A. and I offered to accompany them. We started, a small and select party, with two boatmen to put us ashore and act as guides. After a short row we landed and commenced our walk.

It certainly was a very pleasant one, though it did not merit all the praises lately sung in its favour. A long undulating road led us between low green banks adorned here and there with small clusters of birch-trees and stunted shrubs: evergreens that refreshed the eye after the monotony of the sea: but we saw nothing more "luxuriant" than this. There was a lightness in the air at once buoyant and refreshing. To our left the sea plashed soothingly upon the beach. Out upon the blue waters the ship was still taking in her cargo. We felt rather like being cast upon a desert island, and wondered what would become of us if the vessel went to one part of the island and we to another, so that we finally missed one another. It was quite an alarming thought, and the ladies turned pale as they gave utterance to it and clung to each other for consolation—as we all turn to those who have the first claim upon our affections when trouble lays his rude hand upon us. But we had faith in our amiable captain, and this thought restored tranquillity to their agitated minds.

Presently we came to a few scattered houses, and looked for the inhabitants, who, in this and other parts of this northern coast, are said to resemble fishes, from the fact that they have little else to live upon. We detected no resemblance, but as only two or three people

crossed our path our experience was limited. Whether it was merely the quietness of the Sunday that reigned, or whether this deserted aspect of affairs was the normal condition of the village, we had no means of ascertaining. Our guides were amiable, but even less intelligent than their kind, and as they could not speak a word of English they might have been dumb as well as stupid. Once or twice when we particularly wished to be enlightened upon some subject we endeavoured to make ourselves intelligible by signs, but humiliating failure was the result. It was only when, later on, we rested at an inn, awaiting the arrival of the boat, that, asking them if they would like some beer, they responded by signs as full of intelligence and acquiescence as need have been.

Passing through the village, we came upon a more barren spot

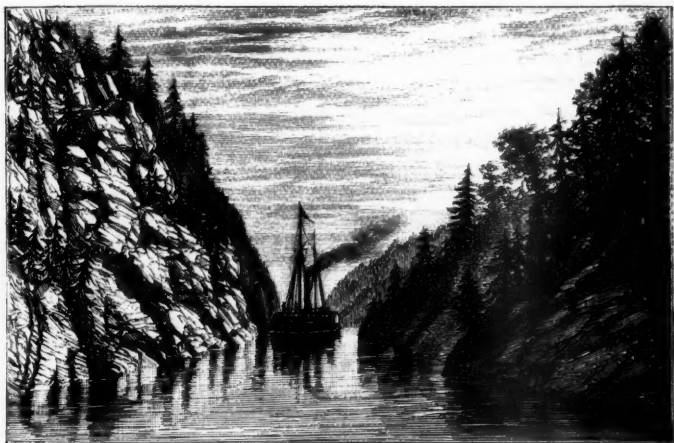


TRÖMSÖ.

overlooking the sea, in the midst of which stood the church of Throndenaes. It is a curious monument of antiquity, and was once the chapel belonging to a monastery. Of the latter all trace has disappeared. Near the church was the "priest's house," and out came two young boys, probably the priest's sons, with the keys of the church. The interior of the building was small; quaint and curious rather than beautiful. Over the altar were some closed pictures, and the boys swung back the shutters on hinges that seemed ready to fall to pieces, and disclosed old and hideous daubs all out of drawing and perspective, impossible faces and extraordinary contortions, which the youths proudly exhibited as priceless treasures. A pulpit black with age was in the middle of the church, and dark ancient pews were amongst the interesting relics of antiquity. A small opening led into what must once have been a sacristy, with an old stone that no doubt held holy water in the days of the monks:

whilst a railed partition up a narrow, quaintly-carved staircase might have secluded nuns at their devotions. In this little place, only a few feet square, one could stand and go back centuries in imagination, to an age when men chanted their matins and their vespers, held their feasts and their fasts, and measured time not by events but by the rolling hours: with only their little quips and cranks, small quibbles and jealousies amongst themselves, to vary the endless monotony of their existence. "The world, forgetting, by the world forgot."

It is a quiet and desolate enough place now; then it must have been the very embodiment of a living tomb: a death in life. And for that matter the monasteries of to-day, buried in those far-off



ON OUR WAY SOUTHWARD.

solitudes, amidst the eternal silence of dark, gloomy forests or lonely mountain heights, are no better. It is all a living death. Go, for instance, to the Monastery of La Chartreuse. Watch a monk creep out of his cell with stealthy tread and disappear down the long cloisters until the far-off gloom hides him from view, whilst he goes on his way, it may be to perform some penance. See them all gliding out of their cells at midnight, a long, solemn, silent, mysterious, cowed procession, each carrying a lantern which obscures yet more the surrounding darkness and lights faintly their footsteps only: footsteps that make no sound in the long, cold, stone corridors, and find no echo in the distant arches. Watch them gliding into the dark chapel, each taking his seat and placing before him his lantern: all done as silently as if they were hooded ghosts: listen to the melancholy chant of the midnight mass, which sounds more like a requiem for the dead than the prayers and praises that should animate the

living : and see what a mistake it all seems ; what a waste of life ; what a gloomy, incomprehensible state of things : as I have said, what a death in life.

In a little gallery at the west end of the church at Throndenaes there was a small organ that looked as old as the building itself. We went up and inspected its jet-black keys, struggled through the loft and struggled out again, and finally left the church. The boys locked the door, and went off triumphantly with a half krohn apiece, which, however, they examined critically and commercially before they tore away to their home. We continued our walk, and by-and-by came to the little inn close to the sea-shore, where we took refuge from the rain that now began to fall, and waited for the reappearance of the steamer. It was a quaint and interesting little place, and the man and woman of the inn seemed anxious that we should make ourselves comfortable and at home. They showed us over their kitchen, brought us biscuits and Norwegian beer, made coffee for the ladies, and talked and chattered just as if we could understand what they said. Whilst the boatmen in an adjoining room emptied their bottles, and looked the picture of contented happiness.

After waiting for about half an hour—just as we began to think the Captain had forsaken us after all—the steamer rounded the point and steered for the land. We bade farewell to the good people, who accompanied us to the little slanting pier, up which the water was washing, and getting into a boat were quickly rowed to the vessel. Once on deck the guilty consciences of our fellow passengers were apparent. Everyone's face was turned the other way, seemingly looking out for whales or sea-serpents, and no one asked us how we had fared. Had we not landed at Throndenaes its praises would have been sung in our ears to the end of the voyage: as it was, not a word was said about it: it sank into unmerited oblivion. For we had in truth much enjoyed our excursion ; had seen more and gone further than those who had landed in the early morning ; and lastly, had carried away a vivid and pleasant impression of the people at the inn and the half-hour we had spent there.

Monday we were once more at the Lofodens, winding in and out amongst them the whole day: enjoying again those grand and glorious peaks and pinnacles, snow-capped and, to-day, somewhat cloud-capped too. About seven in the evening we finally left them. As we did so, the clouds rolled away like a scroll, and once more restored us to the glories of sun and sky and warm breezes which had now been four days absent from us. Once more as we receded from them, they stood out in all their grandeur and magnificence: immense cathedrals of stone built by no human hand, rising out of the great waters. A halo of glory surrounded them this evening as the sun neared, then sank below the peaks ; all the more vivid for the late gloom and darkness of the skies. All nature was flushed, and all the glorious

tints of an arctic night once more surprised and awed us by their beauty. The sea "took up the tale" and reflected back the most brilliant hues. The last vision of the Lofodens dwells in the memory as a dream almost of a celestial paradise.

Crossing the Vestfjord we landed at a small station, and mounted a hill in the hope of gaining a good view of the midnight sun. But at the actual moment—when it ceases to descend, runs an instant along the horizon, and then rises upwards again—we did not see it. The now far-off Lofodens for once were in the way.

Tuesday morning, to everyone's joy, was brilliant with sunny skies. At 4 a.m. we passed Bödö, where we had landed on the journey northwards, and it seemed quite an old familiar friend to us. At eleven we passed again the grand snowfield with its splendid glaciers, crossed the Arctic Circle and passed the Hestmand, and so glided from the regions of the midnight sun. Towards evening we passed the mountain of the Seven Sisters; a grand cluster rising nearly 3,000 feet high, with seven peaks. At five o'clock we reached Sannesöen; a lovely spot with low hills bathed in sunshine, surrounding a small harbour full of boats. On the land was a small, brown, picturesque church, with a little tower surmounted by a species of dome-spire that looked as if it might be shut up like a telescope. From this place we had a grand view of the Seven Sisters: those gigantic granite mountains, whose peaks rose up so sharply, with long curves between.

During the night we had passed our old friend Torghatten, where we had previously landed and climbed up to its wonderful tunnel. Wednesday rose cold and cloudy, but cleared up towards evening, as we passed through a narrow channel with just width enough for the steamer. It was a wonderful and very lovely spot, and we glided through pale green transparent waters, surrounded by lonely hills and mountains. Then the channel opened up into a magnificent natural harbour, and we passed through quite a fleet of vessels riding at anchor, painted in gay colours that reflected themselves in the calm waters. This was one of the prettiest sights of a voyage that had been crowded with beautiful sights and impressions.

The evening wore on to night: night that was now very decided twilight. In the middle of that night Thronhjelm was reached. Here a few of the passengers landed and we saw them no more. Before we were up in the morning, the ancient capital was far out of sight, and the second visit we had wished to pay the cathedral had to be deferred to some future occasion. Thursday morning, in cold and cloudy weather, we made Christiansund: but how different was the aspect and impression of the place from that first morning when we had seen it in all the glorious sunshine and all the picturesque solemnity of the water funeral! Now we were only too glad to leave it and make way. At 9.30 that evening, when the clouds had all cleared away, and a brilliant sunset was once more charming us beyond words, we

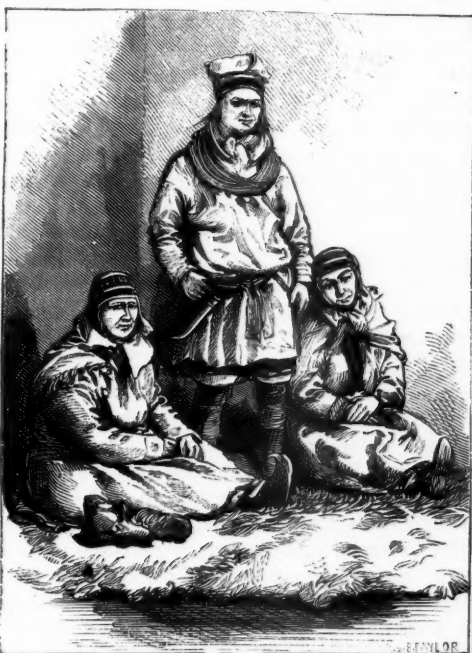
entered the beautiful Moldefjord with its luxuriant slopes, and steamed up to the town. Molde, as seen that evening, bathed in all the glorious hues of sunset, could never be forgotten. The opposite hills, including the giant Romsdalshorn, were flushed, and in the rosy light looked far more like dream mountains than realities. The town itself, so beautifully situated, with its fertile and towering slopes in the background, almost wooed one by its aspect to bid the steamer farewell and become more intimately acquainted with its charms. The situation was lonely, as is the situation of almost all the towns on the Northward journey; but it is a loneliness probably that strikes only the traveller, not the inhabitants. Home is home, no matter where, no matter what; be it in the centre of a busy capital, or situated in some lonesome valley, or perched upon an isolated rock. On the journey upwards we had landed some people at a small far-away spot, of which one might have thought them the sole inhabitants, so utterly gloomy and deserted was this little island in the midst of the sea. Yet when they came in sight of it rapture had seized them, and here evidently they found their happiness.

In Molde one could easily imagine happiness: it would be more difficult to picture the contrary. But the traveller has somewhat to rough it in the way of accommodation. Here we lost more of our passengers, including the two American sisters, who were courageously travelling about alone, in search, like everyone else, of new scenes and impressions: laying up a store of memories for a time, be it near or far off, which is sure to come to all, if they live long enough: a day when travelling has lost its charm, and the exertion is not worth the reward. Many a man, like Sydney Smith, has lamented that his opportunities for travelling only came to him when he was too old to enjoy them. Therefore, O young man, take thine opportunity when it comes unto thee: for opportunities seldom come twice to any man, and that which is neglected passes away into the womb of time, never to return.

Our opportunity for visiting Molde had not come, and we steamed onwards again. As we passed the hotel, the American ladies waved a farewell from their windows, and then all faded from sight. At one o'clock a.m. we reached Aalesund. The gloom, but not the darkness, of night was spread over the little town, for as yet we had not returned to the regions of positive obscurity. The town was steeped in solemn quietude. In situation it is one of the most picturesque of the towns on this coast. The houses appeared well built, and were grouped, many of them, on the slopes of the hills, made picturesque and almost romantic—for Norway—by trees which grew about them, and relieved the barrenness that is but too apparent in many of these places. The inner harbour ran up between the houses and was separated from the outer by great locks. Through these came boats with cargo for the steamer, and a boatload of passengers bound for Bergen. Far away beyond the town we

caught sight of grand mountains whose peaks seemed to repose in the sky: the range of the Langfjeld. As we looked, the first flush of dawn tinged them with unearthly beauty; and as the sun crept upwards towards the horizon, the tone crept downwards over the earth, until at length the whole town was bathed in crimson light, the windows reflected a red glow, and the gloom brightened into the first glories of early morning.

Aalesund is a town of about 6,000 inhabitants, comparatively new but prosperous, carrying on a thriving trade in codfish with Spain and Italy. The fish are caught in nets which are sunk far down in the sea, their position marked by green glass buoys. When hauled up, the nets often break with the weight of the codfish, which abound in these waters. But though the town itself is of recent date, the surrounding country has many associations in connection with the ancient history of Norway. Not far from here was the castle inhabited by the famous Rollo, founder of the duchy of Normandy, and ancestor of William the Conqueror.



LAPPS.

Here we bade a reluctant farewell to our pleasant travelling companion Lieutenant X., who was landing at Aalesund with the intention of crossing the famous Justedal glacier, the largest and grandest in Europe. He left us in one of the shore boats, and toiling up the hill was lost amongst the houses of the sleeping town. We saw him no more.

We too departed, and all the next day were winding about the islands and between the rocks that cross our path as we approach towards Bergen. Again we passed the entrance to the Sognefjord, called at the various stations, revelled in the warmth and sunshine that gilded this our last day's journey, and about ten o'clock at night rounded the point that brought us immediately in sight of Bergen.

Now, returning to scenes almost familiar, we realised that our journey to the North Cape was a thing of the past. We had seen the midnight sun; for days had been without sunset; and though the culminating point—the midnight sun at the North Cape itself—had been a failure, the journey on the whole had been a success. Looking backward it was a source of the pleasantest recollections. Better still, one felt strengthened and invigorated in mind and body by the pure air, the changing scenes, the variety of impressions in which for seventeen days we had revelled. The wet and gloomy days had been dull and tedious, it is true, but, like the small failings in a life that has gone from us, they were remembered no more.

Bergen, as we approached it in the glow of evening, looked more picturesque than ever, with its quaint houses rising one above another on the green slopes of the hills that towered in three distinct masses: whilst the harbour, crowded as usual with shipping, ran far up into the town, between modern warehouses, and ancient buildings with gable ends, and an old fortress that was being whitewashed inside and out and prepared for an approaching visit of the King.

Fortunately for us, we had telegraphed from the last station for quarters at Holdt's Hotel, and they had reserved for us the one large room at their disposal. Many of the passengers were walking about for hours afterwards, seeking rooms, and finding them at length with great difficulty, if they found them at all: for Bergen, between travellers and the near approach of royalty, was full to overflowing. One of our passengers, with his three ladies, was amongst the unfortunate number: and to add to his distress, he lost part of his luggage in landing. Some of it got taken to one place, and some to another. We had not been five minutes at the hotel, and were talking to some acquaintances we had chanced to meet, when down he came like an avalanche, and began searching amongst the new arrivals for his lost property. Amongst other rooms he entered ours—we had only gone into it ourselves in the darkness—and there, sure enough, was one of his bags upon a chair. He pounced upon it, glared at us suspiciously, looked under the beds, behind the door and beneath the table, but found no more. Finally he went off, evidently persuaded in his own mind that we had laid violent hands upon his chattels. But in our hearts we could find only pity for him. We were comfortably quartered at the hotel: he had been less fortunate: and there are few things more trying to the temper than having to perambulate the streets at the midnight hour, dead beat, in search of a place in which to lay one's weary head and aching limbs.

Midnight, too, was now midnight in reality. On our return to Bergen we had the luxury of darkness for some hours: a luxury few can realise until they have paid a visit to the North Cape, and crossed within the Arctic Circle during those long weeks, when, for these latitudes, there is "no night."

SIR CECIL'S RIVAL.

I.

THE Hon. and Rev. Augustus Fordyce meeting with the preference that befitted his noble family connections, if not his talents, the parish of St. Jude's, Briarford, was left for some time without a vicar. The vacant living was finally accepted by the Reverend Frederick Spenser, who came down at once to inspect his future sphere of labour, and who as quickly delivered himself of a few sentiments without reserve. Before the new incumbent had been four-and-twenty hours in the parish, every soul knew that serious changes were impending.

"The truth is, there is so much to be done that I hardly know where to begin," explained Mr. Spenser with the most engaging candour, as, propping his back against a high painted pew, he glanced over the church from east to west, from roof to pavement, in his quick, decided manner.

If the newly-appointed vicar did not know where to begin, it was clear that he did not know where to end. But at last a day came, when the church had been half rebuilt and wholly refurnished, and he himself entered at the tail of some twenty or thirty little white-robed boys, that the soul of the Reverend Frederick Spenser knew peace. It was a pleasing spectacle, but that did not dispose of the awkward problem of the unsettled bill of all these pretty things. Mr. Spenser addressed himself to the difficulty with his characteristic energy, and with the aid of his adherents, who were many and warm, he soon cleared off the greater portion of the debt. Undisguised begging in the form of a subscription list in the first place, and in the second a concert given by amateur musicians, zealous but incompetent, had effected this; and it was now proposed to wipe off the remaining incubus of debt by the proceeds of a bazaar.

The weather favoured the scheme. Lovelier day never dawned than that twentieth of June, the appointed date. While still early, all the town of Briarford and half the county were pouring in and out of the mimic fair. Midway through the afternoon a fresh arrival in the hall attracted some attention. This was Sir Cecil Thorpe, who, upon attaining his majority some six or seven years back, had come into one of the finest estates in the county. Where fortune has bestowed her smiles, there the world will also lavish its favour; so now, upon Sir Cecil's approach, bright faces grew brighter, grim lips relaxed, and anxious brows smoothed. The stall-holders exerted themselves to good purpose; for at first it seemed as though a veritable goose laying golden eggs had come to the sacrifice. But

there was a certain method in Sir Cecil's liberality. Sauntering slowly up the room, he paused at each stall in turn; but having spent a reasonable amount with such readiness as to awaken great hopes in the breasts of fair saleswomen, he was not to be induced to lay out any further sums. His refusal was laughing and pleasant; but he invariably passed on remorselessly to the next emporium of cushions and teakettle-holders.

Only upon reaching the head of the room, which was occupied by two stalls, did Sir Cecil depart from this judicious course of action. At the first of these tables he came to a decided stop, and lounging across it, spoke with familiar ease and brevity to the handsome girl with bold eyes, and bolder tongue, who presided there.

"How do you do, Adelaide?"

"Quite well, thank you; but I have no time to-day for frivolous conversation."

The young lady's manner, however, belied her words; for, permitting an old gentleman, upon whom she would have swooped three minutes earlier, to pass unscathed, she leaned over the improvised counter, ready for any extent of chat. They were cousins, Sir Cecil Thorpe and Adelaide Dudley; and his sunny blue eyes and pleasant smile had long ago won Adelaide's heart. Unaware of his spoil, Sir Cecil only thought of her as a sharp sort of girl for a fellow to talk to, and was especially glad to find her now in this desert, where were few of his kind.

Sir Cecil Thorpe glanced at the articles before him, lifting one or two, then flicking them contemptuously aside.

"Who is the young lady to the right?" he asked at length, dropping his voice a little. "She does not seem to be doing a very brisk trade."

"Poor Miss Spenser! no; I suppose she knows but few people," said Adelaide Dudley carelessly.

"Oh! that's Miss Spenser, is it?"—"And a deuced pretty girl she is," he thought, but did not say. "I understood the Reverend Frederick was expecting his family to take up their abode with him, and they have apparently arrived," he added aloud after a minute's interval. "How many more such household deities has he?"

"His household deities, Cecil, as you term them, are two in number; this sister and his mother. Spenser, senior, would seem to have departed this evil world," Miss Dudley ended with flippancy.

At this juncture a strong party of customers claimed Miss Dudley's attention, and under cover of the distraction Sir Cecil Thorpe glided away to seek "fresh fields and pastures new." He had not, however, sauntered on half a dozen paces before he heard a manly voice behind greeting him.

"Glad to see you here, Sir Cecil!"

"Hallo! Spenser, how do you do? Yes, here I am, doing my

duty like a man. I am almost, but not quite cleaned out, and I propose to finish the process here," rejoined Thorpe.

Nothing could have fallen out better.

"My sister," said the Reverend Frederick. Then turning to the young lady he added: "Ethel, Sir Cecil Thorpe is anxious to get rid of some burdensome cash." Having performed which ceremony, Mr. Spenser went his way.

At the informal introduction two soft dark eyes were lifted shyly for a moment, and a faint sea-shell pink tinted the most innocent, lovely face it had ever been Sir Cecil's lot to behold, as Miss Spenser gravely inclined her head. Then her slim hands sought for, and laid out before Sir Cecil Thorpe smoking caps and such other articles as might be supposed to be useful to a young man, in a quiet almost apologetic manner, and without one word of the fluent recommendation that would have fallen from Miss Dudley's lips under the same circumstances.

"What am I to buy? Please tell me."

"What do you wish for?" asked Miss Spenser, in a soft low voice that matched the tender grace of her face.

"There is such an embarrassment of riches that I shall leave myself in your hands; have you any conscience?"

"I *should* have none to-day."

"Have you made heaps of money?"

"No, I am rather unsuccessful. It is my fault, I daresay. My mother should have been here to help me, but she is laid up with a bad headache."

"Indeed!" said Sir Cecil, upon the whole rather glad of the old lady's absence, and wishing Miss Spenser would again raise the broad white lids that so jealously curtained her lovely eyes.

"I am stupid at this sort of thing. Do you think I shall sell half?" asked Miss Spenser, eyeing her piles of wares with an air of pensive speculation.

"I don't know; but the case looks pretty hopeless, does it not? Never mind, it is quiet to chat; I've been knocked almost into little bits in the crowd: I assure you that I've sustained severe injuries. May I come round there to rest?" asked Thorpe eagerly, pointing to some chairs behind Miss Spenser's stall.

"No, certainly not," answered Ethel, laughing softly.

"It is very hard; I'm sure my exhaustion must be written upon my countenance."

His subterfuge—if subterfuge it were—was successful. Miss Spenser's glance was instinctively raised to his face, and Thorpe took a deep satisfying draught of the beauty of her eyes.

"You don't look very bad," answered the girl after surveying his handsome, stalwart looks. "At all events, you may not have one of these chairs; but there are some benches in the middle of the room."

"Thanks; but I prefer my physical sufferings to banishment."

Their acquaintanceship was progressing hopefully. In the beginning Sir Cecil Thorpe kept turning over a few of the articles on the table, as though laboriously striving to make up his mind which he should appropriate to himself; in reality intent upon watching for the vagrant colour that came and went in the girl's clear cheeks, and laying stratagems for the pretty dimples that danced for a moment about her mouth, transforming its usual aspect of meek gravity into an emblem of innocent mirth.

Miss Spenser's method of conducting business rather amused Sir Cecil in contrast with Adelaide Dudley's sharpness in that particular. Miss Spenser served people with what they asked for, or had a strong desire to possess; received their money, counted out their change to them gravely and carefully, and then permitted them to go on their way rejoicing.

"Miss Spenser, when the flies walk into your parlour," advised Thorpe, regarding the anxious expression of her small countenance "you should not let them go again so easily."

"But how am I to keep them?—I want dreadfully to make at least a respectable sum."

Sir Cecil laughed at this high flight of ambition. "Of which I see as much prospect as of my being made Emperor of China," said he, twirling round a small piece of worsted work, which he had picked up, to the destruction of its pink-and-white beauty.

Thorpe was sorry for his words and laugh when he saw the concern deepen upon her childish countenance, and, compassionating her distress while utterly unable to comprehend it, it occurred to him, that perhaps he might help her to dispose of some of her articles.

Just then a prosperous farmer's wife came up, and Sir Cecil regarded her as a favourable subject for experiment. This lady, reaching out a huge hand cased in a black kid glove of unimaginable dimensions, took up one thing after another, examined it at all points and laid the article down again, dissatisfied. Sir Cecil glanced up and down the stock of fearful and wonderful creations before him to find something of the uses of which he might have some slight idea. Finally, he pitched upon a pair of slippers.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Webster! How is your good husband?"

The woman turned at the sound of the genial voice, and, recognising her landlord, dropped him a respectful curtsy.

"Are you looking for a bargain, Mrs. Webster? Here's a pair of shoes; charming things!"

Mrs. Webster took the slippers from his hand, and finding the ticket, read aloud, "Ten and sixpence. Not much of a bargain, are they?" asked she in a polite tone of deprecation.

Thorpe laughed with perfect good-humour. "Too bad of you, Mrs. Webster, to use my own words against me! Well, they are the greatest comfort in the world and cheap at any price;—I've a pair, and wear them every night."

"La! Sir Cecil, you are not telling me the truth now!" cried the dame laughing; but she tucked the "greatest comfort in the world" under her fat arm, and handed him the money.

"You have not told me how Mr. Webster is. Is he here?" asked Thorpe, detaining his victim with polite conversation.

"No," she answered, taking the attention seriously; "he's not here, sir; he's busy with the hay."

"Then I am sure," said Sir Cecil adroitly, "so good a wife as you are will not go home without a present for him."

"La!" cried Mrs. Webster again; this word of doubtful etymology being that lady's favourite channel for emotion: "Webster'd consider all these things a pack o' rubbish,—meaning no offence."

Sir Cecil, artfully suppressing the fact that his sentiments quite coincided with those of the absent gentleman, called upon Miss Spenser to find a suitable offering; and so a pair of muffetees were disposed of; and then, after one or two further inflictions, this first martyr was permitted to escape.

"There, Miss Spenser," said Thorpe, handing her a couple of sovereigns,—and never had money, not even an unexpected "tip" in his hardest-up days at school, given Sir Cecil Thorpe so much pleasure as those two pounds. "But remember I don't lend my valuable assistance through any consideration for you, because I think you richly deserve your misfortunes." His auditor glanced up, startled; but the young man's laughing eyes reassured her; and the white lids with their heavy fringes were dropped again instantly: perhaps Ethel had read something more than amusement in Sir Cecil's gaze. "It is simply in the interests of the committee that I take all this trouble, and out of regard for my friend Spenser."

That first commercial success was followed by many more; and the little pucker of anxiety was getting smoothed out of Ethel's fair face, as she watched the rapidly-increasing piles of coin; and the bright smiles with which he was thanked, was reward enough to Sir Cecil for his exertions. He had not lived eight-and-twenty years in the world without learning that pincushions even had merits when recommended by a wealthy baronet beyond what they would have possessed if extolled by less powerful lips. Although, to be just to the world, a large portion of the favour always ready for Sir Cecil Thorpe was due to the inherent nobility and kindness of his nature, of which his pleasant, gracious manner was but the natural outcome.

At eleven o'clock upon that same night Sir Cecil Thorpe, having at length had some dinner, sat alone over his wine in the great dining-room of Thorpe Hall casting up accounts, and he found himself—

Plus: One cushion with a lion from Central Africa; another with a parrot from Brazil; a third with arabesques from South Kensington; and a fourth with flowers from every land: three footstools, in subject also zoological, ornithological, and floral; six smoking

caps, any one of which would have excited the envy of an Eastern potentate; and sundry other things, as to the names and uses of which he was completely ignorant.

Minus: A great deal of cash, and—that trifling organ, his heart.

II.

JUST two months later, the Vicarage drawing room one evening wore an unwonted aspect of life and festivity. A fat living was Briarsford, no stinted stipend requiring careful outlay, and the house was a good and pretty residence. The drawing-room was as pleasant a room as rich hangings of a tender, delicate hue, and a wealth of flowers with their living beauty and warm fragrance, could produce. As a rule, only Mr. Spenser and his mother and sister were there to enjoy its luxury; but things were different upon this evening, for it was the appointed date of a feast, to which they had bidden their friends and neighbours. The feast was eaten, and the gentlemen, quitting the wine, had just rejoined the ladies. They had not, however, yet settled into their places, but stood huddled rather like a swarm of bees in the neighbourhood of the door, each probably intent upon selecting the special situation that seemed most desirable in his eyes. Sir Cecil Thorpe had not the least doubt where he should come to anchor; but he intended to take up his position by a strategical movement. Possibly it was a guilty conscience that made him so cautious, or, perhaps, he only dawdled to enhance his enjoyment by anticipation—as we handle a long looked-for letter before breaking the seal, or watch the wine beading round the untasted glass: perhaps he waited for an invitation from the soft eyes, whose every expression he knew so well now. Whatever the motive, however, his hesitation cost him his pleasure, for while he stood aloof, a young man—the only bachelor present besides himself—dropped into the vacant chair at Miss Spenser's side.

Thorpe muttered to himself very strong language upon perceiving the usurpation. Too much disgusted to seek amusement elsewhere, he retained his former station at the head of the room, supporting himself with one arm against the mantelpiece, while he surveyed the company cynically. Seated on a *causeuse* close to him, gossiping with a crony of hers, Miss Burton, was Adelaide Dudley; she had her back to Sir Cecil, so that he could only look down upon her jet black hair wrapped round a stately head, and just catch the shimmer of her yellow silk dress. Their host, the Reverend Frederick Spenser, was seated at a table beneath the chandelier, engaged in turning over a book of photographs for Mrs. Daglish, whose most salient points, her fat and her flaming complexion, were thrown up to highest effect by the crimson velvet robe in which she was attired. Mrs. Daglish was good-nature itself, and she had the highest regard for her clergyman; but she was selecting all his nearest relatives to make uncomplimentary remarks upon, being as regularly over-

whelmed with confusion and colour when her mistakes were discovered to her: so that, what with the blazing chandelier above, her dress, and her accession of colour consequent upon her maladroit criticisms, there seemed to be a fair prospect of her departing this present world, like Peter Simple's mother, by spontaneous combustion.

Dr. Daglish, the small meek husband of this lady, was amusing himself harmlessly with a microscope, well out of everybody's way at a side-table. While, at the other end of the long apartment, sat their hostess boring old Mr. Dudley, Adelaide's father, until the tears almost stood in his eyes. Worthy Mrs. Spenser had only two topics of conversation—missions and horticulture: Mr. Dudley scarcely knew a daisy from a rhododendron, and he would not have cared if all the heathen with the parsons to keep them company, had been at the bottom of the sea. Sir Cecil, who had had a considerable experience of Mrs. Spenser's fluency upon both subjects, wondered with which she was edifying the old squire. Missions, he presently concluded from the fact of the good lady counting on the tips of her fingers, which he knew to be her method of checking her interesting statistics.

But the group to which the young man's eyes turned oftenest, and with constantly-increasing irritation, was that right opposite to him but at some little distance away. The magnet that drew his gaze, his angry and ever angrier gaze, was Ethel Spenser, a lovely vision of youth and innocence in her dainty white raiment. Her dress was of muslin, plain and simple; one deep-red rose burned in the soft dusk masses of her hair, while its fellow nestled warm and rosy amidst soft lace upon her bosom. Other ornament or smallest touch of colour had she none; yet could no woman present compare with her in appearance, as Cecil Thorpe but too well knew: and her exceeding fairness seemed to be taking effect upon her attendant swain, for he kept edging nearer as the evening passed, and growing more earnest in his attention; this result was only natural, the unavoidable effect of her charms, so her companion's admiration and absorption were not to be wondered at; but it was truly maddening to their spectator to watch Miss Spenser's growing interest in the conversation.

The two hapless young people were in truth merely discussing pictures, but the poor baronet could not tell that. He could only see Ethel's sweet face flushing and paling, and the dark eyes glancing up with the innocent wondering look that had charmed away his own heart.

Sir Cecil Thorpe had just concluded that he would go and talk to his cousin Adelaide; talk with interest and empressment, so as to make Ethel suffer some of the pangs of jealousy that he was enduring; when some words of Miss Dudley's and her friend's caused him to pause in the execution of his amiable endeavour.

"Yes, she has a lovely face," said Miss Burton in a slightly lowered voice, and, from the furtive glances cast in her direction, it was patent that Ethel Spenser was the subject of their remarks. "But, innocent as she looks, she seems to understand the art of flirting."

"Innocent!" echoed Adelaide scornfully. "She is as deep a coquette as there is in England. I have seen something of women, and I can tell you that that girl, with her babyish face, is full of wiles, and a desperate flirt, as anyone can see."

Miss Dudley, in speaking thus, was well aware that she had an auditor in Cecil Thorpe, and she also knew how rankling a thorn she had planted in his breast. Honourable and steadfast himself, he would be intolerant of the slightest shade of levity in a woman; and, moreover, there was a dark page in his parents' history that had cast its shadow over his youth, and would cause him to resent what another man would call but venial.

The next moment, breaking in upon the gossip of the girls and Thorpe's wrathful reflections, came an interruption from their hostess: her voice was borne along the room in pathetic appeal.

"Frederick, will you come here a moment?"

But her son did not seem to hear across the waste of Mrs. Daglish's fat shoulders; so Mrs. Spenser was compelled to try the other member of her family.

"Ethel!"

Thereupon Thorpe sprang to the rescue; he had become quite domesticated in the house from the frequency and duration of his visits, and it was always his impulse to be kind and attentive.

"What is it, Mrs. Spenser? Can I be of service?"

"No, thank you—Ethel," said her mother, turning now to that young lady, who had at length come forward. "I wish you would go to the conservatory and fetch me that new orchid to show Mr. Dudley." The missions were apparently used up, and horticulture reached.

Sir Cecil interposed, saying that he would get the flower, and he begged ceremoniously that Miss Spenser should not be troubled: but the latter had already passed into the conservatory.

"Will you allow me to reach it, Miss Spenser?" asked he, coming up to Ethel as she was in the act of stretching out her hand to gather the blossom.

Upon hearing the freezing tones of his voice Ethel turned in surprise, and thus met his stern regard, matching the accents in which he spoke.

"Thank you, I have managed," answered she with quiet dignity.

"It was such a pity for your very interesting conversation to be interrupted," said Thorpe, with what he intended to be cutting irony.

"Not at all; I was glad of the change."

Ethel's innocence was disarming, and Thorpe had no intention of

suffering in silence, so he resorted to plainest protest. "How could you go on with that detestable puppy in the manner you have been doing all the evening?"

"What have I done wrong?" asked Ethel, the sweet mouth beginning to droop, and the tears to gather in her dark eyes. The poor child was ignorant as to the nature of her offence, but it was not the less upon that account a cause of dismay.

Sir Cecil was in part mollified by her penitence and her loveliness, as she stood there in her great beauty, looking up at him in meek appeal. "Ethel, don't you know that you belong to me?" demanded he, grasping her hand without any regard for the valuable flower-specimen.

Ethel saw the passion in his face that was bent over hers, heard it in his thrilling tones, and she turned quickly away, but she was quivering under the infection of his excitement.

Perhaps her trembling silence and swift averting of her countenance satisfied Thorpe better than any speech; for he drew her towards him whispering, "My darling, do you love me? Am I so blessed?"

The next moment a sound close at hand startled them. What smote upon their ears was the rustle of a woman's dress advancing, and it was followed by a sharp and clear voice in peremptory summons.

"Miss Spenser, are you coming?"

The foolish young people had but just time to start asunder when Miss Dudley made her appearance, rounding a pyramid of tall plants.

"I came to seek you," said that lady, with engaging candour, quite mastering the situation with those cold shrewd eyes of hers. "I think Mrs. Spenser is waiting for that flower, but I will carry it to her; it would be a pity for you to shorten your botanical studies."

"As you like," said Sir Cecil, fronting the intruder daringly, his handsome face flushed and triumphant.

But Ethel had already flown off to the drawing-room.

III.

THE course of Sir Cecil's love had up to this time been of an even, prosperous character, one uncalculated to rob him of sleep or appetite; but upon the night following that brief scene in the conservatory, slumber was banished from his eyelids by the fever of passion that burned in his veins. Giving speech and utterance to his love seemed to have awakened it to more conscious existence—an activity of life that would not allow to its subject repose or calm. So with the dawn Thorpe arose; and at ten, having with difficulty restrained his ardour till that hour, he ordered his dogcart to drive into Briarford. The golden corn was waving in the fresh breeze; the many-tinted woods and flashing river lay bathed in the glorious light of the morning sun; but it was of none of these things that Sir Cecil was thinking; it was

none of the comelinesses of Nature that brought the light into the young man's eye, and the smile about his mouth. As he was being swiftly borne through that fair scene Thorpe's mind was centred entirely upon the coming meeting with Ethel Spenser: he was picturing her shy consent to be his wife, and planning how he would extort from her sweet lips a confession of love—the confession that her soft eyes had made many times.

Just as Sir Cecil Thorpe reached the Vicarage door it was thrown open from within, disclosing Mr. Spenser, who was preparing to issue forth. That gentleman would not have permitted a prince of the blood to delay him in a parochial duty, far less a young man who was constituting himself into a regular member of the household; so now he only paused to fling wide the door of the morning-room, and excuse himself briefly.

"How do you do? Walk in; perhaps you will excuse me as I am going out on a matter of urgency."

Sir Cecil would have excused him for all time with the most absolute content: the estimable clergyman was not the person whom he wanted. But, glancing round the room into which he had been so summarily shown, Sir Cecil found it also empty of his divinity. The apartment was quite vacant, an unusual circumstance, for it was the ordinary family sitting-room at that period of the day.

One of the French windows which opened into the verandah stood ajar, and Thorpe advanced to look if Ethel had stepped out into the garden, as she would often take occasion to do if her attention were attracted by a specially-alluring rose, or a flower in need of tying up; anything in fact that would furnish a plea for straying forth into the early sunshine. But Miss Spenser was nowhere in sight, and Thorpe was turning again within doors to wait, with what patience he might, when his glance fell upon the davenport, which had been very evidently drawn up to the window that the writer thereat might enjoy the morning air.

Miss Spenser had apparently been interrupted in the midst of epistolary labours. There was a pen laid down; a carnation tied together with a fern-leaf:—seeing the little bunch the young man smiled to himself, he could so well picture Ethel placing such between the folds of her innocent notes,—on the blotting-pad was a letter just commenced, and beside it one that had come through the post, the empty envelope of which had fallen to the ground, the superscription being like the handwriting of the note bold and dashing. Peculiarly so.

"That fellow must have a small tree felled when he wants a new pen," said Sir Cecil to himself with a light-hearted laugh, as he picked up the envelope from the carpet and put it back in its place on the desk.

The next moment Sir Cecil's face had turned of a ghastly hue, and a word of bitter meaning and emphasis burst from his lips.

What was there in that simple scene to cause this excitement? Enough. In the glance which Thorpe had had of the open letter in laying down its cover upon the table, some words in the large black characters had been apparent to him. They were the conclusion:

“And now good-bye, dearest and sweetest.

“Ever, your own loving

“BEVIS TREHAWKE.”

There could be no mistake; the syllables in that bold, decided writing stood out as clear as daylight, burning themselves into his brain, and there beside them, her delicate caligraphy offering a strong contrast, was Ethel's reply.

“MY OWN DARLING BEVIS,—I have had your letter and kissed it a hundred times; would that it had been your dear self—” At that point Thorpe stopped; even in so terrible a moment the instinct of the gentleman rose to prevent his reading words meant for another, and clenching his teeth and hands in his fierce wrath, he strode away to the other end of the room.

“The coquette!” he muttered, grinding his teeth in his bitter sense of betrayal. Ah! was not that what those women were saying last night, those women to whom, had they been but men, he would then have given the lie. It was true—women knew each other more truly than men could do; and they had seen the guile, the wickedness that lay behind that fair face. Thereupon a vision of that “fair face,” its crystalline transparency, its childlike purity, rose before his eyes, and he groaned aloud.

“Oh! Ethel, Ethel, do you know what you have done? Why have you thus betrayed me?” the young man cried despairingly: then his mood changed, and recollecting the ardent sentiment of the letter, he laughed in scorn and derision. “Bah! it is sickening; and I, fool that I was, thinking how I might teach those shy lips to frame the words, ‘I love you.’ Truly, they are practised enough already!”

Sir Cecil's sad and bitter thoughts were broken in upon by a slight stir and the rustle of a woman's dress on the floor above: a picture of Ethel in her sweet and tender beauty floated before him, and he felt that if he were once to look into her innocent eyes and meet her tender confiding smile and faint blush, with which she was used to greet and welcome him, he should either gather her, frail and false as she was, into his arms, or reproach her with madder upbraidings. So he turned and left the house; never more to enter it.

IV.

How severe to Sir Cecil Thorpe of all men, was the blow of discovering that his idol was only clay, and very coarse clay, it would be impossible to describe. All things became a weariness to him: life had lost its savour. His course alone was clear; he must quit Briarford, both as unspeakably distasteful as the late scene of his dream of happiness, and a possible meeting-ground at any time with his fair false love. Therefore he set his house in order and set out on uncertain travels; perchance in the varied spectacle and constant change of life, he might learn to forget.

It is curious to note the several cures that different men adopt for the relief of that malady, grief: some think it may be drowned in dissipation, and these, losing it, lose themselves also. Some address themselves to work with all their might and main; and these are right, for work is the great assuager of every evil under the sun. Others again try to outrun their troubles which, though, mostly mount behind, and pursue wherever their victims flee. Of this latter class was Sir Cecil Thorpe. The first refuge that suggested itself to his mind was flight; but if he had entertained any great hopes of recovery from the regimen, he was disappointed. In actual experience he discovered that classic lake and mountain, and monument of hoary antiquity were as vanities, and but weariness to him, for the persistency with which one fair face kept thrusting itself ever before his vision, wringing his heart with old memories, or pictures of what might have been.

At last, after six months' fruitless wandering, Thorpe felt his steps irresistibly drawn towards home, and one evening when the March winds were blowing high he found himself once more at Briarford. Early next morning he sent for his bailiff and for a week or two occupied himself energetically in looking into various business matters. But it was again the old experience. His former weariness clung to him, and the farming and live stock and county doings, which had before yielded him such pleasure and interest, had become like all else dull, stale and unprofitable. By the end of the month, the whole life was intolerable; and he resolved to go abroad again, running up in the first instance to town for a few days, and there letting chance determine whither his steps should next be turned.

Upon the morning prior to his departure, Sir Cecil started to look at some cottages in course of erection upon his property. As he stumped along the country road giving a critical glance occasionally, notwithstanding the broken state of his heart, at his park wall on the one hand and some open land of his on the other, his ear was caught by a peculiar sound. When his attention was first attracted, these sounds were distant but growing instantly nearer—in another minute he recognised the noise as that of a horse tearing along the highway as fast as hoofs could be laid to the ground; and he had but

just time to draw aside when a riderless horse shot past. In the momentary glimpse he had of the mad creature before he was lost to sight in a turn of the road, Thorpe noticed that the vacant saddle was a lady's. In much concern he turned back; and, retracing his steps, was shortly upon the scene of the accident: coming up just in time to see a young lady pick herself out of the ditch that bordered the way.

"Are you hurt?" exclaimed Thorpe, and the abrupt question was all that he could articulate in the breathless state that he was in as a consequence of his run.

"No; I don't think I am," the victim of the mishap replied. "No, not at all," added she, more emphatically after balancing herself experimentally upon her feet for a moment.

"You are sure of it?" asked Thorpe, looking at the girl with anxiety as she stood there before him on the sodden, wintry turf.

"Yes, quite: I got a slight shake; but I am all right again." Saying which the stranger seated herself with great composure in the hedge.

Sir Cecil picked his way over the wet ground to her side. "Can I be of any service?" enquired he in his kindly, pleasant tones.

"Thank you, but I think not," answered the girl looking up from her occupation of endeavouring to restore some form to her hat, and revealing to Thorpe a pleasant, fresh young face with frank grey eyes and a rather wide mouth. "My groom will be up in the space of half-an-hour or so, and he must find my horse for me."

"You don't mean to say that you will mount that animal again?"

"Of course I shall! Why not? I am not a bit the worse for my tumble;—except," added she, as she pommelled vigorously at her head-gear, "that I have spoilt a hat, and shall take home a small estate in mud."

"The land is mine; let me assure you that you are most welcome to all that you have appropriated," said Sir Cecil smiling, and much amused by this easy and self-possessed young lady.

"Yes, you are Sir Cecil Thorpe, are you not?"

"Precisely."

"I saw you last week driving up the High Street—in Briarford, I mean. You were behind as handsome a pair of chestnuts as I ever saw; they attracted my attention, and then it was that I learned who you were."

Thorpe felt a natural curiosity as to whom his new acquaintance might be, and considered himself entitled now to the information. "And I have the pleasure of speaking to—?" said he in a tone of interrogation.

"Miss Bevis Trehawke," said the girl, supplying the hiatus.

"Bevis Trehawke!" gasped Thorpe. "What—what do you mean?"

"I told you my name, that was all," answered the young lady, fixing her eyes wide with astonishment upon Sir Cecil's flushed face.

"I beg your pardon," said Thorpe, endeavouring to collect himself—hearing that name spoken, that hated name which had wrought such havoc in his life, had completely unnerved him. "I beg your pardon, I did not follow your remark; of whom were you speaking?"

"I said who I was; nothing more. Did you not put the question to me?"

"You are called Bevis Trehawke—just that?"

"Yes, you seem surprised; but it is the name that always goes with Trehawke Castle. I get the name with the property from an uncle."

"Indeed!" was all the response Sir Cecil made. He was lost in thought; could there have only been a simple mistake at the bottom of that past unhappy business? He must know more.

"You cannot have been long in this neighbourhood?" said he suggestively.

"Oh! I am but an importation, a transient dweller in these parts: I am paying a visit at the Vicarage; Miss Spenser and I are old school-friends."

"I have the pleasure of knowing Miss Spenser; indeed all the family. Are they well?" asked Thorpe endeavouring to speak unconcernedly, as though of ordinary acquaintances.

"I have never heard Ethel speak of you," said the downright young lady addressed, at the same time taking a quiet survey of her companion's features.

"Nevertheless they *are* old friends of mine," said Sir Cecil with some irritation, feeling the colour rising into his face under Miss Trehawke's steady regard.

At length she turned her glance down again to the whip she was twisting in her hand, and replied to Thorpe's first enquiry. "Well, Sir Cecil, Mrs. Spenser and Frederick are well; but Ethel is very ill, fading slowly out of life."

"No, no," said Sir Cecil, as soon as he could recover from the shock of Miss Trehawke's words. "It may be serious, but you are exaggerating her state."

"I wish I were, but in my opinion she is dying. Nothing rouses her, nothing interests her."

"I hope you may be mistaken—I hope you may be mistaken," said Thorpe, a sickening pain fastening itself upon his heart.

The silence which ensued was only broken by the arrival at last of the groom. Sir Cecil then roused himself.

"You will permit me to drive you home, Miss Trehawke? Your servant could carry a message to my place; and a carriage be here in a quarter of an hour."

"Thanks, no," was the reply of that spirited young lady. "It is necessary to Sultan's education that I should mount him again."

"Defer the improvement of Sultan, and allow me to have the pleasure of seeing you home; will you have the chestnuts?"

"Oh! they are not to be resisted," said Miss Trehawke, sparkling with interest now. "I should like to try them."

Sir Cecil tore a leaf out of his pocket-book, upon which he scribbled a line or two, then handing it to the man he despatched him on his horse with instructions to be quick. The groom having disappeared at a sharp gallop, Thorpe proposed to Miss Trehawke that they should walk along the road to meet the carriage, which could not be long in reaching them. He was right, for they had not proceeded far on their way before they heard the sound of rapidly-approaching wheels.

"The darlings!" exclaimed Miss Trehawke, observing critically the action of the handsome pair of horses which drew the phaeton. "Let me drive."

"By all means, if you wish it," said Thorpe laughing at her enthusiasm.

So the reins were given into Miss Trehawke's hands, and under her effective Jehuship the short journey was soon accomplished.

"Come in," said she to Thorpe, peremptorily, as she pulled up the horses in masterly style at the Vicarage door. "Mrs. Spenser ought to be very much obliged to you for looking after her troublesome visitor."

"Not at all," answered Thorpe, but he gladly followed his fair companion into the house, where he was at once marshalled into the morning-room—the pleasant parlour with the French windows opening on to the lawn which he had cause to remember so well.

Miss Spenser was seated there alone. "Ethel, here is Sir Cecil Thorpe," announced Miss Trehawke, preceding the young man up the room.

Thorpe was eagerly advancing, when from sheer amazement he suddenly came to a stop. This pale shadow was not his fair, bright Ethel, whom he had loved at first sight. It was Ethel, but so wan, so slender, so changed that Thorpe might well doubt her identity. The beautiful eyes, dilated with astonishment, that were lifted for a moment to his, alone seemed to belong to the girl's old self. Thorpe was too much shocked at the change to speak at once, but his first surprise over, he was extending his hand to Miss Spenser according to form, while Miss Trehawke began an animated recital of her morning's adventure as an explanation of Sir Cecil's appearance. Both received an abrupt check; for Ethel, who had risen from her seat in an attempt to greet the visitor, suddenly swayed upon her feet and would have fallen, had not Sir Cecil sprung forward and caught her. Miss Spenser had been overcome with faintness, and it was a perfectly senseless figure that Thorpe the next moment laid down upon the couch where the poor child had been reclining previous to his entrance.

Thorpe thought of nothing, he was conscious of nothing; he obeyed only the impulse of his full heart bursting with love and pity, and casting himself down by the unconscious girl's side, he fell

to kissing her pale lips and brow, her hands and her dress unceasingly: as though a wanderer famished, he would never be satisfied.

A remark in Miss Trehawke's calm tones presently recalled the young man. "That may be an efficacious treatment for a fainting fit, Sir Cecil; but I think, if you will allow me, I will try some more usual remedy."

Thorpe, upon that, arose to his feet with some celerity and so met Miss Trehawke's amused glance. "Shall I ring for assistance?" stammered he guiltily, feeling as though all the blood in his body were collecting in his face.

"I think not," said Miss Trehawke, as she bent over Ethel. "You will find some water on that side-table; get me a glassful."

Thorpe brought it, and helped her next to chafe the invalid's hands, and otherwise restore her, so that in a little while signs of returning life were apparent.

"Move a little farther away," Miss Trehawke then bade her somewhat incapable, but zealous assistant. "There is something in all this that I do not understand."

Sir Cecil was quite ready to add the apprehension of the present mystery to Miss Trehawke's stock of knowledge, and he was commencing an explanation, when she motioned to him to be quiet; and the next moment the sick girl spoke in her slow soft tones.

"Are we alone? I fancied—" she began, sitting up and looking around her anxiously.

Sir Cecil stepped forward. "Are you better, Miss Spenser?"

"Yes, thank you. I fainted, did I not?" asked Ethel. Adding hurriedly, while a crimson flush overspread her cheeks, making her more like her old self, the fair image that Sir Cecil had carried in his heart through many a varied scene: "I am very weak; a slight exertion, or—or surprise, overcomes me."

Then Miss Trehawke struck into the conversation to inform Ethel how she had been thrown from her horse and Sir Cecil came to her rescue, and the dreadful state she was still in, and it was quite time that she assumed more civilised attire; saying which, and her fresh face smiling at them brightly from beneath her bent hat, she went her way. Scarcely had the room door closed upon her than Sir Cecil Thorpe commenced his pleading.

"Miss Spenser—Ethel—can I hope that you will listen to me after the mad folly with which I have acted?"

"I do not know what you mean, Sir Cecil," answered the girl, endeavouring to still the throbbing of her heart, and to speak with cold dignity.

"Ethel, you know that I loved you from the first moment that I saw you, and I had some hope that my feelings were in a measure returned. To win you for my wife had become the dearest ambition of my life, when suddenly an event occurred which made me suppose that you had been only coquetting with me and deceiving me. In

a mad haste and passion I rushed away from England, but I could not forget you; and I find to-day that my suspicion was all a mistake: will you forgive me?"

"A mistake," murmured Ethel, her breath coming in laboured gasps. "Why should you suspect me?"

Thorpe thereupon explained to her the occurrence of his seeing the letter with its extravagant expressions of affection, and the effect it had had upon him.

"It might have been very silly; it is a foolish habit with all school-girls," said Ethel, colouring slightly with a childlike feeling of mortification; "but I do not see much harm in it."

"Her name—so peculiar," muttered Thorpe, heartily ashamed of himself now

"I daresay it sounds odd to strangers, but I am so used to it that it never seems but quite natural to me.—Dear Bevis, she has been such a true friend to me."

"My darling, you are too good and too innocent for this wicked world. Never mind; look up and tell me that for my faithful love you will forgive me my stupidity. Do you care at all for me, Ethel? Will you let me come to see you, and, when you are better, carry you away?"

Miss Trehawke, entering a very few minutes later, found two people with warm faces and lit-up eyes respectively seated upon chairs at an unexceptionable distance apart, but there was something unadjusted in their position which caused that astute young lady to divine that those chairs had been but hastily assumed. And, indeed, Sir Cecil Thorpe must have come to a very good understanding with Miss Spenser, for shortly afterwards there was a gay wedding in Briarford, upon which occasion Miss Trehawke flirted so audaciously with the youthful pastor of St. Jude's that it was opined it would not be long before a second match was made

But it might have been only idle fancy, for when Sir Cecil broached the idea to the new Lady Thorpe as they were being whirled along to the coast in an express train, she was quite indignant.

"Oh! no; Frederick means to lead a single life; he holds ascetic views and is entirely devoted to his work."

Sir Cecil laughed in a sceptical fashion.

"But if he were to marry," persisted Ethel, "it would not be to anyone like dear Bevis, who is very nice but enjoys the world and all that sort of thing. Frederick would think only of her help, and would choose some good woman—a 'sister,' or that kind of person."

"My dear," said Thorpe, smiling still, "your brother will marry as other men do, and, I am afraid, from no loftier motive than *love*."

THE WINDS OF GOD.

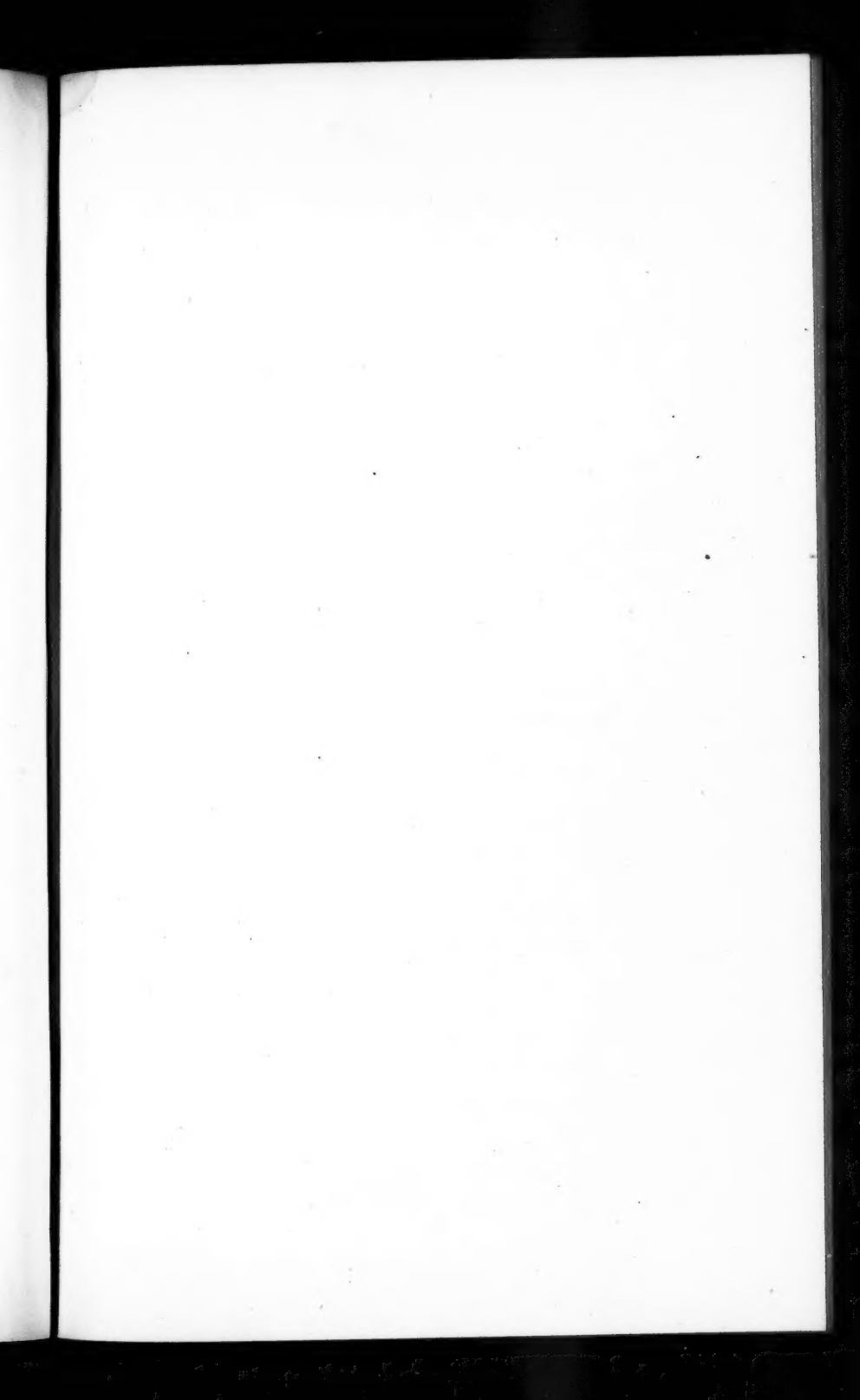
Blow, soft Spring wind !
 Out of the amber west, when down the sky
 The shadows slowly creep, and Heaven's lit lamps
 Speak ev'ning nigh !
 Fan with thy living breath the rousing earth,
 And let thy voice tell to all drowsy hearts
 The year's new birth !

Blow, Summer wind !
 When, after days of drought and sullen heat,
 Out of the heaped-up clouds there comes a sound
 Like echoing feet !
 While from the distance, borne on breezy wings,
 The rain descending on the thirsty plain,
 Its beauty flings !

Blow, Autumn wind !
 Out on the yellow woods and stubble lands,
 Stir the brown brake and scatter thistledown
 With myriad hands !
 Sleep after labour, after turmoil rest :
 By strength and weakness, yea, by life and death,
 The world is blest !

Blow, Winter wind !
 Out o'er the tumbling sea roll cloud and mist ;
 Roar through bare branches, striking wizard notes
 Where'er you list !
 Driving the ships ; and in and out of all
 Working God's will—who, from the frozen seas,
 Came at His call !

Blow, Breath Divine !
 Beyond the depths of the uncounted host,
 Beyond the mystic circle of the sky,
 Come, Holy Ghost !
 Lo ! hatred, blasphemy, and sin aspire
 To raise their devil-thrones amid the gloom,
 Come, quenchless fire !
 Yea ! and the world is buried still in night,
 And loud and long thy watchmen warn in vain—
 Come, Living Light !





M. ELLEN EDWARDS.

WHAT THE FORTUNE-TELLER SAID TO DOROTHY.

R. AND E. TAYLOR.